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THE MEMOIRS OF MARSHAL JOFFRE  
VOLUME ONE



MARSHAL JOFFRE.

*Frontispiece.*  
(Vol. I.)

# THE MEMOIRS OF MARSHAL JOFFRE

*Translated by*

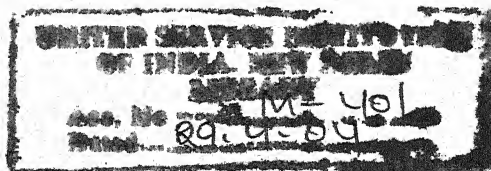
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PART ONE

THE YEARS PRECEDING THE WAR



## CHAPTER I

*I become a member of the War Board, February, 1910—I am appointed Chief of the General Staff, July, 1911—Plan XVI—Plan XVIbis—M. Millerand and the re-organization of the High Command: Decrees of January 20, 1912, and May 14, 1912*

IN SEPTEMBER, 1909, after I had commanded the II Army Corps at Amiens for a year, General Trémeau announced to me, during the cavalry manœuvres which he was conducting at Sissonne, that he intended to appoint me Director of the Services of the Rear, in succession to General Lefort, who was about to be placed on the retired list. I told General Trémeau that I hoped my activity would not be entirely confined to these rather special functions but that I would also be permitted to become initiated in questions which concerned operations. General Trémeau replied that this assignment was only temporary, that he entirely understood my desire and it was his intention to give me the Inspectorship of an Army in addition.

On January 23, 1910, General Brun, Minister of War, appointed me member of the War Board<sup>1</sup> and Director of the Services of the Rear. At the same time I was named Inspector of the VII, XIII, and XIV Army Corps.

On May 2nd following, I took part in the first meeting of the Board. M. Fallières presided, General Trémeau being still Vice-President. The question to be discussed concerned the defensive organization of the northern and eastern frontiers. The matter was already familiar to me, for as Chief Engineer I had studied it, and my opinion on the subject had already been formed. I believed that the only fortifications which should be retained were those capable of offering a serious defence. At that time on our north-eastern frontier there were a number of old-fashioned fortified towns, utterly incapable of resisting modern weapons,

<sup>1</sup> The *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, which will be translated by the term War Board, is composed of general officers who in time of war become commanders of armies. In time of peace each is the inspector of the army corps designated to form his army. The President of this body is the Minister of War; its Vice-President is the general officer who, upon the declaration of war, will become Commander-in-Chief. If the President of the Republic assists at a meeting he takes the chair.—Translator.

and if we persisted in considering them as fortresses, the officers charged with defending them would be placed in an impossible situation.

Therefore, when we came to discuss the fortifications of Montbard, Montmédy, Lomont and Longwy, I expressed the opinion that they and all similar fortified towns should be placed at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief who, in case of necessity, could utilize them as points of support during the campaign, unless indeed it was possible to convert them into modern fortified places. My ideas were not shared by the other members of the Board, who considered that the capacity for resistance of these works was limited only by the ammunition and supplies of various kinds which could be accumulated in them.

However, this discussion furnished me with an opportunity of presenting another idea which had already preoccupied me for some time. I urged that in order properly to reinforce these places we ought to have a supply of very mobile heavy field-artillery. In this matter we were seriously behind-hand as compared with the Germans. I considered that the material which I proposed should serve two purposes: it should be suitable for augmenting the defence of fortified places when attacked, while at the same time it should be capable of co-operating in the work assigned to light siege batteries.

The question seemed considerably to interest President Fallières, for he turned to the Minister of War and asked his opinion. The latter stated that the only siege material we had was that intended for field operations, and he added that we could not maintain both equipments on the same footing because of lack of funds. This way of begging the question deflected the mentality of General Brun, but it did not satisfy the President, who after stating that our inferiority in this matter should receive attention and be remedied, added: "This discussion ought to be followed by some practical conclusion; studies should be immediately undertaken and actively pushed with a view to constituting an easily transported artillery for our fortified towns." The Minister of War thereupon directed me to make a study of our needs in the matter of heavy artillery for fortress warfare.

If this study was to be useful, I considered that it should be made under the general hypothesis of a war with Germany having the characteristics to be anticipated at that epoch; it was especially important to take into account the advance which the Germans possessed over us in regard to the preliminary concentration of forces.

I based the general idea of my manœuvre upon a combination of the offensive and the defensive. Our defensive zone would comprise a bridge-

head created at Nancy, then Toul and the Hauts-de-Meuse up to and above Verdun, prolonged by temporary fortifications extending to the region of Buzancy and Rethel. To the right of this position, held with the least number of forces, a first mass would counter-attack in the direction of Sarrebourg-Sarreguemines, covered in the direction of Strasbourg by a secondary attack. To the left of the defensive front, a second mass was held in reserve; if the counter-offensive on the right should meet with a partial check, the left attack would be reinforced by corps taken from the right and transported by railway. Thus augmented, it would in its turn take the offensive in the direction of the Belgian Ardennes.

Generals Pau and Léon Durand were good enough to join me in making these studies; to them were added a certain number of young officers, amongst whom were Majors Payot, de la Boisse, Pouydraguin and Carence. Two studies resulted: one made by my staff, having in view the strategical conditions of the manœuvre and its tactical execution; the other, made with the assistance of some officers of the Fourth Bureau,<sup>2</sup> examined the new problem which I had in view—namely, the transport of large bodies of troops during operations. I have to admit that Colonel Saveriau, then chief of this Bureau, showed very little enthusiasm for what he called “these innovations,” declaring himself sceptical in regard to the practical possibility of an improvised transport of troops—so rigid and timid was the old conception of the use to be made of railways in time of war.

The first study, treating of the tactical part of the problem, enabled me to bring into the light many questions, notably the matter of temporary fortification and the equipment required by modern war, in addition to the initial object of my investigation, which was the question of artillery.

Now, the defence of the Hauts-de-Meuse presented a problem which the flat trajectory of the 75mm. gun did not solve; for all along these steep hills there was dead ground which we could not reach with its projectiles.

This general study was continued during October and November, 1910, in all its details. We considered both the holding of our own initial defensive front as well as the besieging of the German fortified places, and as a conclusion I arrived at the absolute necessity of having a light 4-inch or 5-inch howitzer, capable of firing at high angles and hence of being assigned to the same tasks as the field gun, but against defiladed targets.

The detailed report on this subject, which I addressed to the Minister, was transmitted to General Michel, who had succeeded General Tréneau.

<sup>2</sup> The bureau of the General Staff having to do with transportation.

as Vice-President of the War Board, while at the same time exercising the functions of President of the High Commission for fortified places. General Michel replied that the adoption of the light howitzer was not necessary; he considered that the 6-inch Rimmel was quite sufficient both as siege gun and field gun; he assigned to each army corps only one group of these pieces. I could in no wise share his opinion concerning the Rimmel, wholly unsuited as it was to the work he expected of it.

In this way the question was buried, and, it must be acknowledged, buried with the complicity of the office of the Chief of Artillery which, under pretext of keeping to one calibre only, was directing its researches towards the development of a 75mm. projectile capable of giving a highly curved trajectory.

But if the study that I had undertaken did not give any practical results, it nevertheless had been useful as a preparation for my war functions as Director of the Services of the Rear. It had in particular concentrated my attention upon the importance of the railway transport of troops during the course of operations, and I had already arrived at the conviction that in a modern war of masses the true strategic instrument of a Commander-in-Chief would be the railway.

I took advantage of every opportunity to throw light upon this question. As the inspector of an army, I was called upon to direct two *manœuvres des cadres*, one in February, 1911, the other in June of the same year. These two exercises offer a considerable retrospective interest, because it seems to me that there can be found in them the characteristic elements of the manœuvre of the Marne, that is to say, the formation on the outer wing of an enemy of a mass of attack constituted by forces taken from the other extremity of the front and transported by railway, using for their detraining a fortified region suitable for that purpose.

In the first of these exercises, the theme of the manœuvre was inspired by the situation in which the Army of Bourbaki found itself during the winter of 1870-71. It was as follows:

An army, transported by railway, was being concentrated between Dijon and Besançon; in the presence of an adverse offensive analogous to that of General Manteuffel, it had covered itself in the direction of Vesoul against enemy forces reported in this region, while forming front in the region of Mirebeau, with its left near Dijon, considered as a temporary fortified region. At the same time, thirteen corps had been massed in the vicinity of Dijon with the idea of debouching against the right flank of the enemy, who was pursuing his offensive in the direction of the Saône.



The second exercise was intended to serve as a study for the Rear Services. This time I wished to examine the conveyance by railway of a whole army having in view a strategic operation. It was supposed that two armies were retreating in the face of a superior enemy in a south-west direction on each side of the fortified place of Langres. A third army had been formed in the interior and placed at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief. The latter had transported it by railway to the valley of the Saône, in order to concentrate it on the left flank of the enemy.

These studies brought me very fruitful instruction. I was particularly led to believe that our regulations covering the transport of troops during operations were too timid and that they ought to be revised. In spite of the resistance of what I will call the "old Fourth Bureau" I believed that these movements instead of being exceptional would prove to be the rule during the coming years. I had moreover caused to be prepared a great many variations to Plan XVI, using all sorts of hypotheses. The result of these studies was to render the staffs and technical organs much more supple, thus preparing them better for their rôle in time of war. I might say in passing that it was one of these variations prepared when I was Director of the Rear, which became the modification of Plan XVI, as established in September, 1911.

During the year 1911 the foreign situation became suddenly threatening. The months of April, May and June had been filled with the march of troops toward Meknès and Fez and the Germans, so to speak, had demanded their retreat. The police operations that we were pursuing in Morocco had necessitated the sending of important forces taken either from Algeria and Tunisia or from the colonial army, and even from garrisons in France. There resulted a serious disturbance in the organization of our mobilization during exactly the period when bad luck seemed to pursue our Ministers of War. Indeed, since the sudden death of General Brun on February 11th, three Ministers had succeeded each other at the rue St. Dominique. The last one, M. Messimy, took up the reins at a tragic moment. The very day after his installation, July 1, 1911, the *Panther* anchored at Agadir and the German Ambassador, Baron von Schoen, took such a tone with the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. de Selves, that, following this interview, a conference was held at the house of M. Caillaux, the Prime Minister, at which the question of sending troops to Agadir was brought up. In London there ensued a warlike speech from Lloyd George, and the tremendous drop on the Stock Exchange became transformed into panic. For a long time the possibility of war had not seemed so near. At the War Ministry the alarm was sounded and all the



measures required for mobilization were prepared. To complete the picture, it must be added that the interior situation of France was at that time far from satisfactory.

The new Minister was faced with a large and difficult task. M. Messimy had been an officer of the General Staff and he had surrounded himself with a number of his former comrades. Most of these were officers of exceptional worth, in whom the Minister had every confidence, and, thoroughly alive as they were to the needs of the Army, they had a large share in the important work accomplished by their chief. Amongst these men particular mention should be made of Captain Duval, Majors Brisaud-Desmaillet, Mesple, Guillemin, and Army Comptroller Boone, all of whom had a most happy influence upon M. Messimy.

The Ministry had hardly entered upon its functions when a grave crisis arose in the High Command.

The commander-in-chief designate at this epoch was General Michel. A few days before the death of General Brun<sup>3</sup> he had handed the Minister a memorandum which had created a sensation. Comparing the military situation of France with that of Germany, he proclaimed the near equivalence of active and reserve formations. General Michel had in view a wholly new utilization of our reserve regiments. His idea was to form, under the command of the colonel of each active infantry regiment, a demi-brigade constituted by joining to each active regiment the corresponding reserve regiment. In this way a mobilized division and army corps would have a strength in infantry double that existing in time of peace. In addition, the plan anticipated for each army corps the assignment of a group of 6-inch Raimbault guns of 2 batteries each. To comprehend the astonishment which such a proposition excited at this time we must examine the mentality which existed at that moment. For, however strange it may seem, this matter of reserves had become a political question.

On one hand, the parties of the Right maintained that the only force upon which the country could depend for its defence was the Active Army. They declared themselves hostile to the principle of the nation in arms, in which they saw the beginnings of a militia army. They consented to the employment of reserves only as an auxiliary, necessary to raise the peace army to its war strength. Convinced that any war would be of short duration, they were not willing to take into consideration anything except the active army, the pillar of all national defence. No sacrifice seemed to them too great if destined to strengthen that force. As for

<sup>3</sup> Minister of War.

reserve formations, by reason of their weakness in the matter of officers and non-commissioned officers, and because of the necessity in which we found ourselves of using all our reservists and hence of taking men well advanced in age, they denied the possibility of having these reserve formations participate in war operations, properly speaking. Their use for anything but secondary tasks was envisaged only after they had been submitted to preliminary training. Opposed to this idea were the parties of the Left, who would listen to nothing except the nation in arms, refused to admit the necessity of a long term for military service, and insisted that a few months' training would suffice for the citizen soldier when called to arms at the moment of war. Everyone will remember the discussions aroused by Jaurès when he published his celebrated book, *L'Armée Nouvelle*.

In the light of history and of the long war we have gone through, it is clear that both sides exaggerated, and that the truth lay, as so often happens, between these two extremes. But it did not require the terrible trial that we have just endured to make it clear that the weakness of reserve formations lay chiefly in the matter of officers and non-commissioned officers, and that after a period of training in good hands they were capable of fighting alongside active units. However much public opinion allowed itself to be swayed by passion in judging this question, it is only fair to say that the War Board was not influenced by any such considerations, and that it considered the matter quite impartially. I am convinced that the same proposition if submitted today to the Board would receive the same answer as was given at that moment.

During conversations which General Michel had with the Minister of War during the first two weeks of July, 1911, he urged that the organization which he proposed should be submitted to the deliberations of the War Board. M. Messimy agreed, but without any enthusiasm, to inscribe the question on the order of the day for the next meeting. I say "without enthusiasm" because several months before, on the occasion of two lectures given at the Centre of Higher War Studies by the Chief of the Operations Bureau of the General Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel de Grandmaison, General Michel had rather unskillfully endeavoured to justify his conceptions of strategy, with the result that his reputation had considerably suffered.

The War Board met on July 19th with M. Messimy in the chair. On the agenda there were three questions:

1. Suppression of Laon and of La Fère as fortified places.
2. Creation of mobile heavy artillery and a field mortar.

3. General Michel's propositions concerning the organization of mobilized units and the employment of reserve troops.

The Minister opened the meeting by expressing the wish that, in view of the seriousness of the present situation, the discussions should be inspired solely by the desire to increase the efficiency of all the organs of national defence.

On the first question the Board expressed the opinion that Laon and La Fère should be abolished as fortified places.

When the second question came up I asked to express my opinion. I explained that during numerous exercises which I had directed it had been established that in order to reach zones which the 75mm. gun could not attain, we were often obliged to have recourse to the 6-inch gun, and thus employ 90 lb. projectiles when one of 35 lb. would have been sufficient. It therefore appeared to me indispensable to adopt a light howitzer, which could attack dead ground unreachable by the 75mm. gun, and likewise be capable of accompanying, in certain cases, the infantry attack. General Michel immediately opposed his opinion to mine, pointing out above all the inconveniences of having too many calibres. A vote was taken and the Board rejected his advice, declaring that a light howitzer ought to be adopted.

General Michel's proposals were then taken up. The Minister stated that it was at the General's express wish that he presented them for discussion. This led to a pitched battle. Each member of the Board in turn presented his objections: lack of cohesion and homogeneity in the face of German units that we knew were well officered; complete change in our organization; heaviness of the army corps as a consequence of being raised to sixteen regiments of infantry; five days' delay in our concentration, forcing our detrainning area back to the Marne; too feeble a proportion of artillery as compared with infantry; the need of a new echelon of command, and a consequent increase in the number of staffs, caused by the creation of demi-brigades.

During the course of this discussion, General Michel manifested considerable bad humour. Finally this question was put to a vote: "Shall the principle of demi-brigades be adopted?" The answer was unanimously, "No."

There now immediately began a press campaign, in which constant allusion was made to the unfortunate position in which the Vice-President of the War Board found himself; and for the first time in the history of this Board a full account of the meeting was published in the newspapers. I have always suspected that the Minister of War was responsible

for this campaign. Public opinion was so aroused that General Michel's position soon became impossible.

On July 21, 1911, the Franco-German crisis flared up with unusual intensity, and without further hesitation the Government withdrew from General Michel his letter of command. This necessitated a successor being selected immediately. M. Messimy intended to profit by the situation thus created to bring about a reform in the High Command, a measure to which he was firmly attached. The Minister believed that regrettable separation existed between the War Board with its Vice-President, and the War Ministry administration, which functioned under the orders of the Chief of Staff of the army; for the Vice-President of the Board had in fact no authority over this important organ charged with preparing the Army for war.

M. Messimy first thought of General Pau to succeed General Michel as commander-in-chief designate. No one seemed more worthy of filling this important post, but in an interview which General Pau had with the Minister regarding the matter, he made as the absolute condition of his acceptance a complete liberty in the appointment of general officers. This condition the Minister refused to concede.

M. Messimy then decided to call upon me. "Are you willing to accept the supreme command in time of war?" he asked me. I objected that my career in the Colonies had separated me during a long period from matters relating to a European war, that I had been associated only during a short time with questions having to do with the conduct of operations, and that other members of the War Board appeared to me to be better prepared to fill the post. I then suggested General Pau. "But if it is not possible for the Government to appoint General Pau," answered the Minister, "would you accept?"

"If the Government thought it best to override the objections I have advanced, I would bow before their decision," I answered.

Shortly after this interview I met General Pau in the War Ministry and told him of the conversation which had just taken place. He very cordially insisted on my accepting responsibilities which had just been proposed to me. After he had had another interview with General Pau, the Minister of War informed me that the Government had decided to confide to me the command of the Army in case of mobilization. At the same time, he explained the re-organization of the High Command which he had in view. The title of Vice-President of the War Board would be suppressed, being replaced by that of Chief of the General Staff, which would be conferred upon me in order better to mark my authority over

the War Ministry Staff. However, if the title of Vice-President of the War Board, was suppressed, the functions of that office would continue to exist, and in the absence of the Minister of War, I would preside over the deliberations of the War Board. General Dubail would remain at the head of the War Ministry Staff, taking the title of Chief of Staff of the Army. He would continue the daily duty of presenting papers for the Minister's signature, but he would be under my orders and would preserve his independence only in respect of the promotion of officers. The Chief of Staff of the Army would be aided by assistant chiefs. In case of mobilization, he would remain at the War Ministry and exercise any functions which the Minister of War saw fit to assign to him.

The Chief of the General Staff would receive the command of the principal group of armies, taking with him as his chief of staff the first assistant. By reason of the functions which the last-named officer would have to fulfil at my side, I was requested to select him. This solution seemed to me calculated to suppress the duality of thought which had for so long a time existed as between the Vice-President of the War Board, commander-in-chief designate, and the War Ministry Staff, charged with preparing the mobilization and concentration of the Army and the plan of operations. I therefore gave the suggestion my approval and I immediately began to think of whom to suggest as first assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Army, since this officer would become my chief of staff in time of war. After much reflection, my thoughts became fixed upon three men: Foch, Lanrezac and Castelnau. All of them appeared to me entirely suited to the delicate functions they would have to fill by reason of their intellectual power and the proofs they had already given of military ability.

My preference was altogether for Foch, as being the one whose brain was of a higher order and better adapted to the solution of tactical and strategical problems; but in spite of these eminent qualities, a special consideration prevented me from fixing my choice upon him: M. Messimy had against him certain prejudices, the reasons for which still remain unknown to me. I had a proof of this a very short time afterwards, for having learned that the Minister hesitated to give the General his third star, I had to make urgent representations in order to induce him to appoint Foch a major-general.

This left only Lanrezac and Castelnau. After much hesitation I decided upon the latter, because, as General Trémeau's Chief of Staff, he had already worked on Plan XVI and was thoroughly familiar with all of the mechanism of the War Ministry Staff. I therefore asked the



Minister to appoint him, and his nomination appeared in the Official Gazette with my own, that is, on July 28, 1911. I have always thought that the Government was quite pleased to arrange this coincidence, which served as an answer to rumours intimating that political considerations had influenced it in selecting me as Commander-in-Chief.

Two other decrees appeared at the same time: one re-organized the Council of National Defence, the other prescribed my duties as Chief of the General Staff, and those of the Chief of the War Ministry Staff and those of the first assistant chief of that staff. In regard to the War Board, a change was made whereby the *lettres de service*, giving command of armies to its members, would run for only one year. Moreover—and this was a most happy innovation which soon bore fruit—the commander designated for each army, would, in time of peace, have at his disposal a cabinet composed of the chief of staff and the chief of the bureau of operations of his army in time of war.

The War Ministry Staff was divided into three groups. The first, placed under the direction of General de Castelnau, comprised those organs whose function it was directly to prepare for war—Bureau of Operations, including the general military training of the army, Bureau for the study of foreign armies, Bureau of moves by railway and route march. The second group consisted of the bureaux and sections having to do with the organization, of the active army and of the mobilized army. To the third group were assigned current matters, personnel, matériel, and transfers of troops in time of peace.

The General Staff Committee was also seriously modified. It was to be composed hereafter of the various Chiefs of Staff of armies and the General commanding the War College, and I was to be its President. Its duty would be to study all questions presented by members of the Committee as a result of their annual inspections, find their solution and ensure the application of the measures adopted.

The War College and the Centre of Higher Military Studies, created by decree of October 21, 1910, and intended to prepare future chiefs of staff of armies, were both placed under my immediate orders. The General Staff Committee was to assist me in this task of supervision.

The matter of the High Command was thus at last settled. It had for a long time preoccupied public opinion, and more than once it had aroused violent discussion in the Chamber of Deputies. The re-organization accomplished constituted a marked progress. It ensured a concentration in my hands of powers calculated to create an efficient convergence of military efforts, and it accomplished a much hoped for unity of doctrine,

through the close union it created between the War College, the Centre Higher Studies, the General Staff Committee, the War Ministry Staff, and the Chief of the General Staff.

In accomplishing this work, M. Messimy rendered an immense service to the country; for this reform alone made possible that intense effort in the matter of army organization and transformation which marked the years 1912, 1913 and 1914. I feel it a great honour to have been the first one called upon to direct the work of these great military organs during the years which preceded the war.

One reserve I must make, and that concerns the re-organization of the War Ministry Staff. M. Messimy did not think it necessary to subordinate the directors of the various arms to the Chief of the General Staff, the decree of July, 1908, placing them directly under the Minister of War. In my opinion this was regrettable, and later on I frequently had occasion to deplore the fact that they were independent of me, more especially as regards the Director of Artillery. I shall have more to say on this subject later on.

Immediately after being appointed, I asked for an audience with the President of the Republic, who, by way of a reply, invited me to lunch with him at Rambouillet. I have always had for M. Fallières the greatest respect and the highest esteem, for I found him invariably animated solely by considerations which touched his country's interests. His good sense, tact and integrity were combined with firmness and authority. It was therefore with the greatest pleasure that I found myself, that July day, in the presence of the First Magistrate. His opening words in greeting me were, "I am glad to see an officer of engineers at the head of the army. In my opinion war has really become an engineering art." I have often thought of this remark, because it seems to me profoundly true. It is not enough in these days to have merely military genius; it has to be supplemented by a sense of organization capable of combining and employing the numerous means which science and industrial progress now place at the service of an army. The words of the President take on added weight now that a great war of masses has brought to light the immense complication of all the many elements which had their place in the struggle.

At this time the crisis created by the arrival of the *Panther* in the waters of Agadir was by no means terminated, and in this connection I remember clearly an interview I had during the first days of August with M. Caillaux in the presence of M. Fallières. The Prime Minister asked me this question: "General, they say that Napoleon never fought

a battle unless he thought that he had at least a seventy per cent chance of success. Have we a seventy per cent chance of victory if the situation drives us to the necessity of war?" I did not find it easy to answer, but I finally said, "No, I do not consider that we have that margin."

"Very well," answered Caillaux, "we will negotiate."

This reply without doubt contributed to cause the Government to continue the conversations then going on. In any case, a few days afterwards, M. Cambon arrived from Berlin, and on returning to his post he handed von Kiderlen-Waechter a note which served as a basis for the agreement of November 4th concerning Morocco.

This grave crisis had at least one fortune to result for France, for the Entente Cordiale emerged from it all the stronger. In fact, the beginning of this period marks the first consultations between the French and British General Staffs. General Wilson came across the Channel to work with us and make the arrangements for disembarking, in case of necessity, a British Expeditionary Corps. He was one of the earliest and best architects of Franco-British co-operation.

I now proceeded to choose my immediate collaborators and form my cabinet. The chief of the latter was Major Gamelin. Other members of it were Major Alexandre and Captains Renouard and Bel. It seems hardly necessary to set down anything here in praise of these officers, whom I kept a long time at my side and who left me only for the period necessary to accomplish their service with troops. During this obligatory absence I replaced them by Captains Fétizon and de Galbert. All of them performed their duties magnificently. Two were killed, Bel at the head of a group of Chasseurs-à-Pied in Italy, de Galbert at the head of the 13th Chasseurs on the Somme. Renouard died in the summer of 1918, while commanding an infantry division.

As soon as I was installed in my new functions I began to study the plan of concentration then in operation and known under the name of Plan XVI. As Director of the Services of the Rear I had already become acquainted with its provisions; it was now necessary for me to examine it from the strategic point of view. It may be well to recall here its essential clauses.

From the point of view of organization, the principal characteristics of the plan were as follows:

The assignment to each army corps on mobilization of one additional brigade, composed of two reserve regiments of three battalions each. Exception was made for the five frontier corps, the VI, VII, XX, XIV, XV.



The constitution in each army corps region (except that of the XIX Corps) of one or two divisions composed of reservists. In this way twenty-two new divisions were obtained, of which twelve were assigned to the armies of the north-east, two to Paris, four to the Alps, and four to the fortresses on the eastern frontier.

This organization made it possible to assign to the north-east front sixteen corps of two divisions, two corps of three divisions, twelve reserve divisions, eight cavalry divisions, and twenty-one groups of heavy artillery, with the possibility of adding to them four corps of two divisions, namely the XIV, XV, XXI and the Algerian Army Corps.

- Besides this, if circumstances permitted, it would be possible to assign to the principal theatre the two reserve divisions of Paris, with the two territorial divisions thus made available.

In its general aspect, the concentration presented itself as follows:

In its first line, between Epinal and Verdun, a front of ten army corps divided into three armies; behind the wings of this mass, two armies, one in the Vosges, the other in the region of Vouziers; a group of three divisions of cavalry, placed in the region of Rethel, would cover the left of this formation.

In rear of these armies, in the first line, the remainder of our available forces was assembled ready for manœuvre, in articulated formation, close to railway lines. These consisted of four army corps and twelve reserve divisions, to which might eventually be added the XIV, XV, XIX and XXI Corps. This whole concentration was effected under the protection of our eastern fortifications. In front of the latter, covering operations were provided for, at first by three frontier corps, the VI, VII and XX, and by three divisions of cavalry; after the fifth day at noon, these forces would be strengthened by elements of the I, V and VIII Corps.

Our combatant forces would be ready to enter into action starting with the seventeenth day after mobilization. The most striking characteristic of this plan of concentration was the proportion of forces maintained south of the line Paris-Metz. In fact, out of eighteen corps assigned to the north-east front, fifteen of them were grouped south of this line, with their centre of gravity in the region of Neufchâteau. This concentration evidently took small account of the violation of Belgium by the Germans, although this appeared as a most likely hypothesis. If a German manœuvre enveloped the left of our formation, lacking in strength as it was, the whole of our system would find itself in danger. This hypothesis manifestly had not been considered. Plan XVI was based upon the con-

viction that the Germans would direct against us a straight blow in the region of Metz-Toul-Verdun.

Moreover, the maintenance of an army in reserve—the Sixth—far back of the front, corresponded to the strategic conception of these times. As our effectives were considerably inferior to those of the Germans and as our concentration would be slower than theirs, Plan XVI, as indeed some of the plans which had preceded it, admitted that we would be obliged to receive the first blow in a defensive position and then counter-attack with forces held in reserve and transported to that flank or that point which appeared to be the most favourable.

I found in the office safe of the former Vice-President of the War Board the project of a plan of concentration which showed that my predecessor had been justly preoccupied by the possibility of a German invasion coming through Belgium. This project, based as it was on the general reorganization which he had proposed, constituted the second part of the note which General Michel had placed in the Minister's hands in January, 1911; but it was not communicated to the War Board at its meeting of July 19th.

In this note General Michel admitted *a priori* the violation of Belgium. He proposed to meet it by a much drawn-out formation, a sort of cordon running the whole length of our frontier from Switzerland to Dunkirk. The centre of gravity of our forces was now moved to the extreme left. On the Lorraine front, there remained only two army corps for covering purposes; the general reserves were reduced to five divisions in the region of Paris; three colonial divisions were at Troyes, the XIX Corps was near Dijon, the English in the direction of Soissons.

In assigning the greatest density of his forces to his left wing, General Michel manifestly sought to compensate for the inferiority in natural and artificial means of defence offered by the Franco-Belgian frontier. However, such a plan exposed us to a rupture either of our centre or our right, and risked opening to the enemy the heart of the country, thus enabling him, in case of success, to throw back our armies in a divergent direction and so cut us off from our lines of communication. After studying this plan in all its details, one was tempted to quote the famous terms of the note which Napoleon addressed in 1808 to Berthier: "Is the object of these operations the prevention of contraband? How can anyone think of returning to such foolishness?"

What assurance could we have that the Germans, having divined our intentions, would not change their plans and march against Paris through Lorraine, forcing back the main body of our forces into the region of the

North? In the face of such a situation, the reserves provided would have been unequal to the re-establishment of the situation.

I thus found myself faced, on the one hand, with an approved plan which manifestly did not correspond to the hypothesis of the most likely manoeuvre on the part of the enemy, and, on the other hand, with a tentative plan which exaggerated the importance of this hypothesis and thereby incurred most dangerous risks.

The first thing to do was to determine with precision the probabilities of the violation of Belgium by the Germans. In more general terms, what did we know of their preparations for war and what deductions could we draw from them?

Our Information Service, although disorganized during the preceding years by politics, had learned some of the details of the German plan of mobilization, established in 1907 and still in effect. Starting with this as a basis—and it seemed fairly solid—I admitted that the Germans would, at the beginning, mobilize against Russia some twenty infantry divisions (of which one-half would be reserve divisions) and three cavalry divisions; against France would be directed some sixty-five divisions, one-third of them being reserve divisions and eight of them cavalry. On the thirteenth day, all the units destined to take part in active operations would be assembled on the lines of concentration.

The French considered that the plan of the elder Moltke had been abandoned. His successor, von Schlieffen, who had been chief of the Great General Staff up to 1906, had maintained this plan until 1894, the date of the treaty of alliance between France and Russia. From this moment on, it seemed proved that von Schlieffen had changed the plan and that he intended first to take the offensive against France, while preserving a defensive attitude against Russia. There were numerous indications that the successor of von Schlieffen, the younger Moltke, had adopted this conception as his own. Therefore, in all probability, the Germans would take the offensive against us immediately, although we had no precise information as to the plan which would be followed in the operations. However, a study of the German railway system and its detraining points, on the one hand, and of their defensive organizations, on the other, gave us most useful indications. In Upper Alsace, the railways and their quays seemed calculated for the concentration of five army corps, as a maximum; these forces, with the two divisions already garrisoned there, seemed insufficient for attempting an eccentric manoeuvre through Switzerland. Moreover, the reinforcements assigned to the fortified-barrier Strasbourg-Mutzig and the organization of the Rhine

from Strasbourg to the frontier, seemed intended to make of this part of the field of battle a purely defensive zone, wherein would be engaged only relatively small effectives. On the other hand, the distribution of quays and detraining material led to the conviction that the main body of the German forces would detrain north of the line Metz-Strasbourg, while an important part of these forces might be sent north of the line Sirck-Merzig. Of 110 quays existing north of this line, about ninety had been constructed since 1896, and, following the year 1904, many improvements had been made in the railway system of the Eifel region. However, it was very difficult to decide whether we ought to expect the detraining in the region north of Treves of a large proportion of the active corps intended for action through Belgium against the left flank of our armies, or whether this zone was intended to receive only the corps composed of reservists, which would constitute the flank guard of an attack in force executed against the front of the French armies, the neutrality of Belgium remaining unviolated.

To the first hypothesis, the work that had been going on for the last ten years on the railways and the strategic tendencies of the German General Staff gave much likelihood. However, it was only wise to accept with considerable caution the statements repeatedly published by German authors as to the necessity of violating Belgium. This might be merely a manœuvre, concerted with a view to drawing us toward the north and leaving us uncovered toward the east, where the enemy might seek to obtain a rapid decision. •

Plan XVI took little account of the probability of the violation of Belgium; for, as I have already said, our left did not reach much farther than the region of Vouziers. Moreover, it was weak, and the available reserves were not sufficient to reinforce it and prolong it, except in an insufficient degree. However, this was not the only criticism that could be made of Plan XVI.

To face the sixty-five German divisions that we expected to see appear on our north-east front, the plan provided for the concentration of only thirty-eight French active divisions, augmented by four reserve divisions sent to fortified towns. The twelve reserve divisions maintained in the direction of Dijon, Troyes, Soissons and Laon, were far away, and as we have seen, were destined to fulfil secondary missions.

There resulted a considerable numerical inferiority to our detriment, and this, combined with the sentiment we had that the German mobilization and concentration would be more prompt than ours, explains the strategic intentions to which this concentration corresponded. It was the

so-called theory of the "defensive-offensive" which had been in honour amongst the French for some twenty years. This theory depended largely upon the operations which the Russians would undertake in Poland and the British on the sea—at least to this extent, that it pretended to wear down the German attack by defensive combats along our fortified barrier, for a time sufficiently long to permit the Russians, whose mobilization was very slow, to set their offensive action in motion; once this was done, it would force the Germans to withdraw troops from our front before having obtained a decision there. When such a moment arrived, it was thought that the Russians, on one side, and the French, reinforced by the English, on the other, would simultaneously start a general and decisive offensive. In this scenario, the French Army was expected at first to play the rôle of a covering force for the Triple Entente.

This conception appeared to me to rest upon a sophism, namely, that during the first month of the war no decision would be obtained against us, and this in spite of our evident numerical inferiority and the initiative of operations which we were deliberately handing over to the adversary. It also presented the objection of transferring the war from the very start to French territory; this corresponded neither to our warlike traditions nor to our national temperament, so ready to become alarmed at any first reverses; moreover, the plan was marked with the imprint of our defeat of 1870, in spite of all the efforts which the Republic had made during forty years to provide for our security.

No account, either, was taken of an eventuality which was altogether likely, namely, that the Germans might return to the old von Moltke plan of an immediate offensive directed against the Russians, with the purpose of getting the better of them before they had finished their mobilization, combined with an aggressive defensive temporarily maintained against the French.

All these considerations led me to seek those modifications which it might be advisable to make in our plan of concentration. In the first place, was it possible to reduce the inequality of effectives which condemned us to an initial defensive attitude? It seemed to me that we could diminish it by making better use of our reserve units and by modifying the general distribution of troops along our front. Facing Italy, Plan XVI placed, at the start, the two army corps of our Alpine region (XIV and XV) the elements constituting the XXI Corps, and four reserve divisions. Now, at this moment, Italy had a considerable part of both her land and sea forces occupied with the conquest of Tripoli, or engaged in the war against Turkey. We could, therefore, without serious risk reduce the



forces assigned to our Alpine army and make provision for sending the XIV and XV Corps towards the north-east, under the same conditions as applied to the other army corps.

In regard to the reserve divisions, it seemed to me that the discredit of which they had been the object was exaggerated, and that I could make use of them in the combinations planned for the movements of the army of the first line: therefore, they should be brought closer to the front of battle. In this manner the total forces immediately concentrated on the frontier would be increased to fifty-eight divisions, including the four divisions in the fortified towns of the east. If, moreover, complete arrangements were made for the eventual movement of the XXI and XIX Corps, we could count upon a total of sixty-three divisions ready for use in the operations. Of this number, sixteen only were reserve divisions. We thus arrived at an almost complete equality with the Germans.

The next question was how to organize our front. First, it was necessary to move the left wing of our deployment further north. Considering the forces at our disposal, it did not seem possible to push this movement farther than Mézières. Next, it was essential to reinforce this wing, and for that purpose the fourth group of reserve divisions could be assigned to it, with the XIX Corps to be eventually added. It is true that this prolongation toward the north created a dangerous gap between the Third and Fifth Armies facing the position Metz-Thionville.

These considerations led me, during August, 1911, to draw up a modification of Plan XVI under the form of a variation of the original scheme, involving the following changes:

Move farther north, from the region of Vouziers-Rethel to that of Mézières, the left of our deployment, constituted by the left wing of the cavalry forces.

Bring the four groups of reserve divisions closer to the line of deployment.

Push the army of manœuvre up behind the fortified place of Verdun, and strengthen the latter.

Make definite arrangements for transporting the XIV and XV Corps from the right wing to the direction of Lure and Belfort.

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Prolong the anticipated movement of the XIX Corps as far as Laon, with a view to assigning it to the army on the left flank, and of the XXI Corps as far as Meaux, with a view to assigning it to the army of manœuvre, namely, the Sixth. These modifications could only be considered as a first expedient. To my mind they were merely provisional, and should hold good only until such time as we could seriously envisage an

attitude of vigorous offensive, which alone could protect us from any German manœuvre.

Completely to revise a plan always involves passing through a period of considerable delicacy, and I decided to give to these general directions the form of a simple variation of the original idea. The necessary preliminary studies were finished at the moment when I was leaving for the autumn manœuvres. These studies gave birth to Variation No. 1 of Plan XVI, bearing the date of September, 1911. In this variation the covering force immediately available was composed of the VII, XX and VI Corps, with the 8th, 2nd and 4th Cavalry Divisions placed upon a line marked by Delle, Gifomagny, Corcieux, Bayon, St. Nicholas-du-Port, Domevre-en-Haye, Vigneulles-les-Hattonchâtel, Fresnes-en-Woëvre, Damvillers and Montmédy.

Behind this covering force our six armies were to be assembled from south to north in the following order:

Fourth Army (three corps and a cavalry division) in the region of Belfort, Lure, Remiremont.

First Army (four corps and two cavalry divisions) in the zone of Epinal, Toul, Chaumont and Langres.

Second Army (two corps) in the region of Saint-Dizier, Joinville, Gondrecourt, Ligny-en-Barrois.

Third Army (two corps and two cavalry divisions) in the region of Pierrefitte, Heiltz-le-Maurupt, Bar-le-Duc.

Sixth Army (four corps, plus eventually the XXI) in the triangle of Sainte-Menehould, Rheims, Châlons.

Fifth Army (two corps, plus eventually the XIX) between Amagne and Mézières.

In addition, a group of three cavalry divisions were placed at Renwez; also a group of reserve divisions at Vesoul, one at Toul, one at Bar-le-Duc and Sainte-Menehould, one at Mézières.

It was my idea that, if it became necessary, this concentration could be modified according to the information I received. I might say that its purpose was to give me a means of establishing the detraining areas. The studies in the matter of transport by railway which I had made when I was Director of the Rear, had convinced me that it was possible to make far greater and more assured use of our railways; and that we could, if necessary, easily introduce variations in our detraining. For example, if for political reasons the decision to mobilize was delayed—and I was obliged to anticipate such a case—I might find it necessary to draw back the points of detraining; this I considered it easy to do, in view of the

flexibility already attained by our railway service. If, on the contrary, I should decide to take the offensive before detraining was terminated, I believed it would be possible to push up our advanced-guards by prolonging our line of railway transport, and thus gain one or two days' march. Finally, if information reached me before the strategic movements had been completed, I considered that I could vary the last railway moves with a view to preparing a different manœuvre.

Thanks to these measures, I had succeeded in reducing the numerical disproportion which had existed to our detriment, and I had acquired a greater elasticity in regard to my initial manœuvre. But I felt sure that, whatever happened, the principal weight of the German armies would fall upon us until such time as the Russian forces could pronounce an offensive. To upset this plan, to establish an equilibrium of forces favourable to the Triple Entente and release us from our purely defensive attitude, it seemed to me that the surest way was to obtain from our Russian allies a more vigorous effort.

General Dubail was, therefore, sent to Russia in August, and his visit was rich in results. After conversations with the Czar and the Russian General Staff, he obtained the promise that the mobilization and concentration of the Russian Armies would be hastened in every possible way, and that in any case, they would not wait for their concentration to be finished before starting to act. The offensive would take place as soon as the first-line forces were in their position, and on the sixteenth day the frontier would be crossed. Both sides were in agreement that only a vigorous offensive could bring success. "It is at the very heart of Germany that we must strike," the Emperor had said, "the objective of both of us ought to be Berlin." A formal engagement in this sense was signed by the Chief of the Russian Staff on August 18/31, 1911.

The importance of this agreement is only too evident. The determination to attack, affirmed by both Allies, was calculated to cause the German plan, as we conceived it, to fail; for it might lead our adversary to modify the initial disposition of his forces, or even to abandon the fundamental idea of an offensive directed against us from the very start. In any case, this decision removed the essential reason which for so long a time had condemned us to a conception of operations marked by such great circumspection.

At the beginning of January, 1912, a new ministerial crisis was caused by the incident which arose when M. de Selves appeared before the commission of the Senate examining the Franco-German agreement. A Poin-



caré Cabinet succeeded the Government headed by M. Caillaux and, at the Ministry of War, M. Millerand replaced M. Messimy.

I did not know my new Minister, and I shall often have occasion in the course of these memoirs to refer to the immense services which he rendered his country. For the moment, let it suffice to say that his first acts as Minister of War were most helpful to the Army, which gave him its full confidence from the very beginning.

The day M. Millerand took possession of office, he summoned me for half an hour's conversation at the rue St. Dominique. He asked my opinion as to the decree of July 28, 1911, and informed me that in his opinion it was a mistake to maintain at my side a Chief of Staff charged with treating directly with the Minister all questions touching personnel and current affairs. I answered him that as a matter of fact this combination, in practice, had proved sometimes objectionable. It was true that no difficulty had ever arisen between General Dubail and myself, but this was not wholly the case as between General Dubail and General de Castelnau, by reason of the rôle which the latter was called upon to play at my side in case of mobilization.

M. Millerand stated, as he has since done publicly, that this organization appeared to him to spring from political rather than military considerations. Being fully decided to strengthen the organs responsible for national defence, he informed me of his decision to suppress the post of Chief of the War Ministry Staff and to give to General de Castelnau the title of Deputy Chief of the General Staff.

Some five days later, the decree of January 20, 1912, which was later completed by that of May 14, 1912, abolished the functions of Chief of Staff of the Army. General Dubail was given command of a corps.

In this way all of the powers of the military establishment finally became concentrated in my hands. It was the first time that any such authority had been confided to a single man. My action embraced the training of the Army, its doctrine, its regulations, its mobilization, its concentration. As to the matter of the promotion of officers, the new Minister informed me that it was his intention to ask my advice. We had at last arrived at the logical conception that the man who would have the responsibility of commanding the Army in time of war, should, in time of peace, have in his own hands all the organs of preparation. After a thousand discussions of every kind, after questions of personnel as well as politics had been considered, it finally required the crisis of Agadir to bring about a solution which would have seemed too audacious a short

time before. But it had also required two Ministers of War, animated solely by patriotic considerations, to give to this reform its full effect.

It now remained for me to utilize in the interests of the country the powers thus bestowed, and to do my best to show myself worthy of the confidence that had been placed in me.



## CHAPTER II

### *Transformations of the Army between 1911 and 1914—The Evolution of Its Doctrines*

THE first question I had to solve was to know what general orientation should be given to the whole military organism for which I was now responsible. Above all it was imperative to endow the Army with a clear war doctrine, known to all and unanimously accepted. Fully to comprehend the moral situation which prevailed in the military establishment toward the beginning of 1912, a rapid glance backwards is necessary.

Following 1870, our strategy had been dominated by the fact that we anticipated only a war of defence. Deeply impressed by the German victories, convinced of our own military inferiority as compared with our eastern neighbours, we at first sought safety in permanent fortifications; in accordance with the programme drawn up by General Séré de Riviére, we had created a barrier of forts all along our frontier. By reason of the insufficiency of our railway system, the concentration of the active Army was slower than that of the Germans, and it was to be effected only under the protection of this fortified zone, then would come a series of defensive battles along the concentric crests surrounding the basin of Paris. This indeed was a poor conception, one dominated entirely by the haunting thought of German power and forgetful of the lessons of 1870, which had amply proved that a passive defence is the forerunner of defeat.

After 1890 our strategy became less timid. In fact, a capital event had brought about a revolution in fortification. This was the appearance in 1885 of the high explosive shell, and the experiments undertaken at the Fort of Malmaison the following year proved that our eastern fortifications were no longer capable of resisting this new projectile. Consequently, the wall erected at such great expense along the line of our four great fortified places, Belfort, Epinal, Toul and Verdun, was no longer sufficient to protect the country. This, and the fact that our railways had become considerably improved, led to the idea of demanding a less passive attitude of our field armies. They were now in large measure behind

the gaps reserved in our defensive barrier, more especially in the region of Charmes-Neufchâteau, between the fortresses of Toul and Epinal; here they were held ready to defend these artificial defiles and counter-attack the adversary if he succeeded in forcing the defences.

However, during the time immediately following the Anglo-Boer War, that is to say, towards 1900, a whole series of false doctrines, some of them advanced by our most brilliant military officers, such as General de Negrier, began to undermine even such feeble offensive sentiment as had made its appearance in our war doctrines, to the detriment of the Army's spirit, its confidence in its chiefs and in its regulations. Basing his ideas upon the system successfully employed in the Transvaal by Lord Roberts when he was faced by the Boers—excellent shots but devoid of all ideas of manœuvre and tied to a wholly inert defensive—General de Negrier announced the impotence of any frontal assault and, declaring himself the enemy of so-called decisive attacks, he launched his famous theory as to the impregnability of an army's front. For him and for General Kessler, one of the most eminent soldiers of the period, the height of military art consisted in avoiding battle; success must be sought through an envelopment obtained by an extension of the front. In defending their theory, these men seemed to forget that to put it into practice there would be required in the first place an absolute superiority in effectives.

Other officers advancing the same dogma of the invulnerability of fronts, pretended that the decision must be sought on broken ground where the adverse fire can no longer make itself felt. But these men here forgot that artillery action is required for any decisive operation. Still others constituted themselves the protagonists of the doctrine set forth in the formula: tactical defensive, strategical offensive. Accepting the dogma that any frontal attack is impossible, even with superior forces, and that the improvement in arms favoured the adversary who was on the defensive, they systematically considered that it was advantageous to have themselves attacked. The partisans of this doctrine accepted the risks of a decisive battle which would use up the enemy, while they themselves were not worn out. Then "the event" would be produced with the aid of the strategic reserves. It was no longer a question of enveloping a flank or of counter-attacking with this reserve "for movements of this kind would be made by troops in combat formation, ready to make use of their arms." On the contrary, the idea was to direct this reserve against a point which the enemy could not afford to abandon, and yet from which his troops had been withdrawn! By striking a heavy blow "in corridors

which would be empty of all forces" it was considered that the enemy's morale, and above all that of the High Command, would break to pieces.

It thus came about that an incomplete study of the events of a single war had led the intellectual élite of our Army to believe that the improvement in fire-arms and the power of fire action had so increased the strength of the defensive that an offensive opposed to it had lost all virtue. Battle was avoided and decision was sought through manœuvre.

These theories had a wide echo throughout the Army. They favoured men's secret instincts of self-preservation and gravely undermined the very foundations of our regulations and the confidence of officers in their chiefs. The harm done was serious and profound.

It is true that General Langlois brought out all that was specious in these theories. He showed that the events of the South African War had been studied in a false light, and that general rules had been deduced from one particular case. He declared that fronts were not invulnerable, provided that on some given point superior fire action could be brought against the adversary, and he proclaimed the eternal truth of Napoleon's principle: "War is an act of force. In strategy, battle must be desired and sought with all the will-power that is in us."

The Russo-Japanese War brought a shining confirmation of these words of General Langlois. Then, in the War College, under the inspiration of men like Foch, Lanrezac, and Bourderiat, our young intellectual élite finally shook off the malady of this phraseology which had upset the military world, and returned to a more healthy conception of the general conditions prevailing in war.

At about the same period, toward 1905, many began to doubt the strength which we had assigned to permanent fortifications. Improvements in arms seemed to diminish the force of their resistance, whereas the value of field fortification was enhanced. Both Russians and Japanese had recently given examples of a large use of the new methods. Our fortresses were also accused of absorbing too many of our troops, and we proceeded to de-classify a large number of them, assigning them to our second and third categories of fortified places.

This disfavour into which permanent fortification had fallen, joined to the reaction against the theories evolved after the Anglo-Boer War, produced in what I will call the "Young Army" under the impulsion of its brilliant leaders, a current of ideas which tended to defend the country by the direct action of field troops, since fortification could no longer be depended upon.

But, as always happens when there arises a struggle against a current

of ideas long since established, these disciples were led into an extreme exaggeration touching the doctrine of the offensive. The catch term "mysticism of the offensive" was even invented. However exaggerated the phrase, it nevertheless marks the somewhat unreasoning character which the passion for the offensive took during the years which followed after 1905. It fell to the lot of Lieutenant-Colonel de Grandmaison, Chief of the Bureau of Operations of the General Staff, to elaborate this theory in all its exaggerations, which he did in 1911, during the course of two celebrated lectures of which I have already spoken, whose brilliance made them all the more dangerous.

These new ideas had as yet been adopted only by a small group of intelligent, hard-working and audacious spirits, full of energy and firm of character; and not having participated in the misfortunes of 1870, these men had escaped the obsession of German superiority. In 1911 the new doctrine had not yet penetrated far into the mass of the Army, but even here some movement was beginning. Although it had been swayed for many years between the most extreme theories, this body, commanded for the most part by officers impervious to any innovation, had preserved intact its complete indolence and apathy. It is true that there was much talk of the offensive, since it was the fashion in high places.

The manœuvres of 1911 brought out the true situation only too plainly. The small capacity for manœuvre on the part of the infantry indicated how imperfect its training had been. The fronts of attack were not proportioned to the means available, the ground was badly utilized, the artillery and infantry failed to combine their efforts. The most elementary notions of security were neglected, and the various arms seemed profoundly ignorant of each other's needs. No unity of views animated the higher echelons of command, and at each moment Special Instructions were issued explaining the Field Regulations in one way or the other, according to the temperament of the author.

In short, the great mass of the Army, for so long a time compressed in a defensive mould, possessed neither doctrine nor instruction. Filled with hesitation, it was far from constituting the tool which was necessary for the application of the hard doctrine of the offensive. Officers high in command had grown up in an atmosphere of old-fashioned ideas, and, rendered suspicious by a long period of political agitation, showed themselves as sceptical as they were helpless. It was in this atmosphere that ardent men with fresh ideas, believing they had discovered a doctrine responding to the new conditions of war, were led away by their enthusiasm and thereby fell into dangerous exaggerations. This picture



will give an idea of the morale in the Army when I entered upon my functions.

There was no denying the truth of the affirmation that the offensive alone made it possible to break the will of the adversary. Military history proves it abundantly, and shows us, moreover, that the side which always waits in war has never known anything but defeat. My own opinion also was fully in agreement with the idea that our fortresses no longer presented sufficient strength to serve as the foundation on which to erect the structure of a war plan. However, if I was fully persuaded of the superiority of the offensive, I was equally convinced that we should not apply it inconsiderately, and before the Army had been prepared intellectually and morally for it, or until we possessed war material answering to this highest form of military action.

The determination to give our operations an offensive form, and to prepare the Army for their execution, corresponded entirely with the enlightened opinion of the country, which was weary of eternally hearing the burden of the German menace. Even the peace-loving M. Fallières himself, at the Elysée on January 9, 1912, during a meeting of the Council of National Defence, stated with what pleasure he had seen us give up our defensive projects, bearing as they did the implied avowal of inferiority. "We are determined to march straight against the enemy without hesitation," he said, "the offensive alone is suited to the temperament of our soldiers, and it ought to assure us the victory, provided we are willing to consecrate to the effort all our forces without exception."

And so my task seemed clear enough. It was to create a solid doctrine, impose it upon officers and men alike, and form an instrument capable of being used in the application of what appeared to me the sanest system. To this urgent task I now applied myself.

The first thing to be done was to establish an offensive doctrine upon a reasonable basis and to see that it penetrated every echelon, from the War Board, the General Staff and War College down to the men in the ranks. To accomplish this I had recourse to the only practical method at my disposal, namely, map and ground exercises. As I have already related, when the War Board was re-organized, each of its members was given a small body of officers that constituted the nucleus of the staff which would be assigned to him in case of mobilization, and more especially the chief of this staff. The whole body of these chiefs of staff constituted the Staff Committee.

For the study of the concrete cases which I had in view, it was fully indicated that the members of the War Board and their staffs should be

made use of; this would bring about the double result of fixing our doctrine, and of training the army staffs in their war functions. I, therefore, organized a series of map exercises involving one group of armies against another, to be carried out by members of the Board and their staffs. When these strategic exercises were finished, the general officers who had taken part in them would, in their turn, direct new exercises in which would participate the army corps which fell under their inspection. Then, in the spring, these map exercises were reproduced on the ground; in this manner all the echelons of command found themselves placed exactly as they would be in time of action, with all the normal means of liaison and communication at their disposal. After these exercises, army commanders would reproduce on the ground the map exercises which they had directed during the winter for their army corps.

The result was an intense period of work in which there participated all the officers of the Centre of Higher Military Studies and the professors of the War College. In this way a multitude of ideas, conceptions, audacities and timidities met each other; little by little a doctrine emerged, and very slowly there came to light the conditions under which an offensive might be energetically and yet prudently conducted.

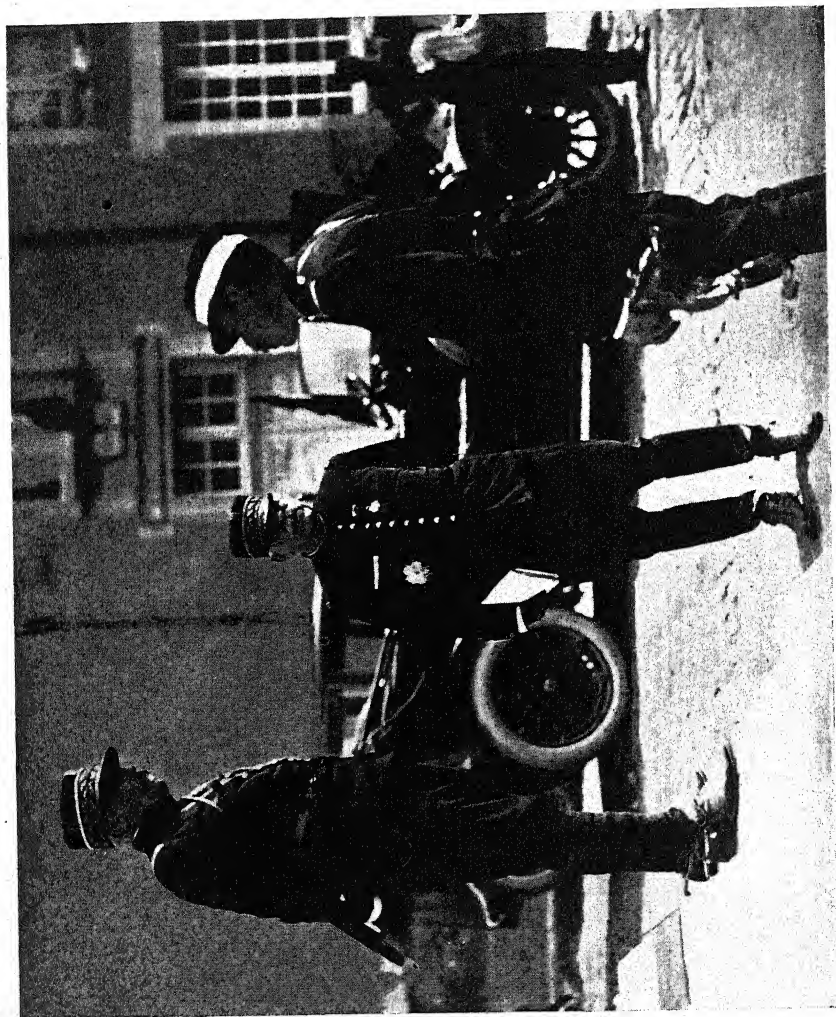
This was the first time such exercises had been organized on so wide a scale. I attached great importance to them. They served to bring to light the realities of war as clearly as is possible in time of peace, and this was accomplished in spite of the crippling effect which a long period of inaction had inevitably produced in the military mind. Another important result sprang from the continual relations thus established between the members of the War Board and their staffs. Indeed, the daily contact between officers of the Staff Committee, the General Staff of the Army, the Centre of Higher Studies, and the War College, were most fruitful in good results, for it contributed to create amongst these various organs an indispensable unity of ideas. More important than all, this work was a preparation for the proper functioning of the staffs of armies at the outbreak of hostilities; for it should not be forgotten, that if at the start the commanders of our large units sometimes proved themselves unequal to their tasks, if weakness of character was occasionally displayed by men who in time of peace had appeared fully equal to the command of an army, on the other hand, the staffs of our armies and army corps never failed fully to meet the situation, and it was often most difficult. It is to the careful preparation of these staffs and their duties that we owe the fact that our lack of success during the first days of the war was not transformed into disaster.



To give an idea of the intensity of the work performed, I may say that during the first six months of 1914, Generals de Castelnau, Langle, Lanrezac, Ruffey, Dubail and Bordet had directed seventy map exercises of army against army, in which took part, besides the directing staffs, ten professors of the War College, and thirty officers of the General Staff of the Army. The cadre manœuvres of one group of armies against another, which I directed, brought about close and constant relations between members of the War Board, the commander of opposing sides, the commanders of armies, or directors of the rear, their staffs and a considerable number of officers taken from the War Ministry Staff or the War College. In preparing the cadre manœuvres of army against army, there were employed, besides the permanent staffs of members of the War Board, a dozen officers from the War College and the General Staff of the Army. In addition to these manœuvres, various members of the Staff Committee, Chiefs of Staff of Armies, such as Generals Anthoine, de Mange and Linder, themselves conducted during the winter of 1913-14 a large number of exercises of army corps and armies, as well as covering operations. This was carried out at the Centre of Higher Military Studies.

I have already said that little by little a logical and sane doctrine of the offensive had taken form in this atmosphere of hard work. It must not be imagined that it constituted an innovation or was made up of novelties. Our studies merely brought out the eternal principles underlying the necessity of the offensive, the obligation of delivering battle only with all one's strength united, of the economy of forces, of the necessity of an unflinching will, of the subordination of all secondary missions to the principal object in view. Nothing in all this was revolutionary or even questionable. They are the principles which all military history has taught us, principles to which we owe the victory of the Marne as well as the victorious campaign during the second half of 1918. It is to the eternal honour of the generation of officers I have been writing about that they contributed to rescue the French Army from the nebulous theories which for so long a time had clouded its spirit.

The Grand Manœuvres held in the west during the autumn of 1912 furnished an occasion for testing generals and staffs in command of troops on the ground. There were assembled two army staffs, four army corps, two cavalry divisions, one reserve division, and the corresponding services. This was the first time manœuvres of army against army had been held, and they were very interesting. General Gallieni commanded one side and General Marion the other. Both showed a clear comprehen-



AT THE GRAND MANŒUVRES OF 1912: GENERAL JOFFRE AND GENERAL DE CASTELNAU.



sion of strategy, and they united and engaged their forces appropriately; the troops showed both endurance and energy and the various participants an admirable offensive spirit; but from a tactical point of view, much was clearly wanting. Although tactical questions were not the essential object of these manœuvres the various actions were not co-ordinated; protection was badly carried out, imprudences in manœuvre led to surprises, and there were grave errors in the use of artillery. In passing, it should be pointed out that these exercises had given us an opportunity of studying the employment of reserve divisions.

They amply proved how imperfect our instruments were. In the territory lying between the two armies there existed deep and wide valleys, much of which ground it was impossible to reach with our guns, and it was once more clearly demonstrated that we had need of pieces giving a curved trajectory, as well as of long range guns, in order to reach targets situated on the reverse slopes of a position.

The following year, the Grand Manœuvres in the south-west brought to light the same defects; they, moreover, revealed the grave deficiencies characterizing certain commanders. While the chiefs of the two opposing armies, Generals Pau and Chomer, were quite equal to their task, certain corps commanders appeared to be totally incapable. These manœuvres proved to me that below the echelon of the army corps, our officers were not prepared to meet the conditions of modern war, and the task of the year 1914 was to obtain this adaptation. In order to accomplish it, I had arranged for sending all the larger units to camps of instruction, where they would be taught their business under the direction of members of the War Board, and it was hoped that during these exercises a process of weeding out the High Command could be undertaken: for this presented itself to my mind as a matter of prime necessity. Many of our general officers had proved that they were incapable of adapting themselves to the conditions of a modern conflict, and for the good of the Army, they ought to be replaced as quickly as possible by younger men with more open minds. The war came on before this important work of regeneration in our higher grades could be accomplished, and we started the campaign with a number of incapable commanders: it was in full tide of battle and under the pressure of events that I was obliged to effect these drastic changes which I had intended to make in time of peace.

Now that our doctrine had been decided upon, it was essential to codify it in a fundamental document intended to serve as a guide for commanders and their staffs. This document took the name of "Regulations

for the Conduct of Large Units," and it was intended to serve as a foundation for the teaching given at the War College and the Centre of Higher Military Studies. It was also intended to serve as the point of departure for new "Regulations governing Armies in the Field," an essential document for units. This was to be followed by Practical Instructions and Drill Regulations for the various arms. In this way I hoped that all the prescriptions concerning the tactical employment of troops would converge towards a central idea, and that thus all along the hierarchy there would be established a single body of principles which would bring about a convergence of efforts.

Boards were appointed, consisting largely of members of the Staff Committee, for drawing up these various regulations, and towards the end of October, 1913, the Minister of War submitted to the President's signature the Decree establishing the "Regulations of the Conduct of Large Units."

This document was written in somewhat ardent prose, somewhat after the manner of a profession of faith; certain phrases even recalled the style employed by the Convention when decreeing victory. It affirmed, as a sort of dogma, that success in war could come only to him who sought to bring the opponent to battle and was capable of delivering it offensively with all his power; the idea of security rested upon the requirement that commanders maintain their freedom of action in the face of an enemy's efforts to impose his will. These regulations were a novelty in this sense, that for the first time the principles governing the conduct of army corps and higher units were set forth in an official text.

The Decree establishing the "Regulations for Armies in the Field," having to do with the rules and proceedings for the employment of divisions and lower units, was signed December 2, 1913, by the President of the Republic. It was in direct opposition to the ideas contained in the Decree of 1895, which, indirectly at least, induced commanders to prefer defence to attack, since the strength of a good position would give him the hope of engaging battle under favourable conditions. Another novelty in this Decree that found an important place in it was the use of field works.

The new Infantry Regulations of April 20, 1914, introduced profound modifications in those dating from December 30, 1908.

Unfortunately these regulations were still being studied by the troops when war broke out. It takes a long time for a doctrine to reach the lower grades, above all after a period of moral inertia such as our Army

had experienced. Therefore, when August, 1914, arrived, the situation was as follows: in the echelons of the High Command, many minds were still often paralysed by habits of routine, and above all by the almost entire absence of any strategic education. The staffs, as a rule, were well trained with good ideas and they had succeeded in freeing themselves from the exaggerations which had prevailed when the offensive began to be preached. From a tactical point of view officers had not yet come to understand fully all that the offensive entailed. While they saw in it a sort of dogma which they were quite willing through tradition and temperament to accept, they nevertheless had not yet comprehended all its exigencies. There existed, especially, a too great tendency to take little account of the conditions of modern war, which no longer permitted an attack to be made as it was in the days of muzzle-loading cannon and muskets. The men in the ranks were ardent, well trained, capable of any boldness and ready for any sacrifice. Indeed, here precisely lay the danger, in view of the mediocre quality of the officers which I have just explained.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 592.



### CHAPTER III

*Plan XVII—Plan XVII (A)—The External Situation of France in 1912-1913—A glance at the various European Powers—The Neutrality of Belgium and of Luxembourg—Russia—What we knew concerning Germany and her intentions*

I HAVE previously explained under what conditions certain modifications had been made in Plan XVI, constituting Variation No. I of this plan, and which was put into effect during the month of September, 1911.

I will here recall summarily that Plan XVI was based upon the single hypothesis that the Germans would deliver a straight blow from the direction of Metz-Toul-Verdun. It presumed that Germany would respect Belgian neutrality and limit her military action to the Franco-German frontier. I had serious doubts concerning this, and it seemed evident that we would risk seeing our left flank enveloped if the enemy did not play fairly. To meet this danger, Variation No. I had pushed the army we held in reserve, the Sixth, towards our left flank. Moreover, Plan XVI, being based upon a counter-offensive on our part, necessarily abandoned a wide band of national territory to the enemy. Our concentration was to take place behind the barrier furnished by our fortresses; the Meuse and the Moselle were to be defended; but Nancy was to be left to its fate. Our covering forces were weak, and the sectors assigned to the frontier army corps were very wide.

As will be seen, the Variation effected in the plan was merely a temporary expedient, applicable only so long as a complete re-arrangement of our scheme of mobilization had not been effected. I therefore decided to study the problem methodically and in all of its aspects.

In the first place, it was the duty of the Government to make clear what the situation of France would be as regards the other European Powers, taking into consideration our own alliances and the probable grouping of European forces.

The existing situation was such that no war between any two groups could be envisaged without examining to what extent the other powers



would observe their agreements and their treaties of alliance or of neutrality. The political attitude of each power not directly interested in the conflict would manifest itself, either at the beginning or during the course of hostilities, by military action such as would probably cause the struggle to extend to several theatres of operations at the same time. For example, if the eventuality of a war between France and Germany was examined, it was imperative to anticipate which States would become our possible allies, which would pass to the enemy, which remain neutral. It was important to make an effort to determine the form and the extent of military intervention to be anticipated from each. Only after this had been done could the political powers prescribe the objective of the operations and make an assignment of forces to each theatre; after this, politics must give strategy a free hand in the principal theatre of operations where decisive action would be undertaken.

Before all things, therefore, it was necessary that I be enlightened as precisely as possible concerning the probable attitude of Russia, Great Britain, Austria, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland and the Balkan States.

As early as July, 1911, that is to say, when the Agadir crisis opened, the Minister of War had asked the Prime Minister to present to the Council of National Defence a series of questions intended to clear up certain points touching the foreign political situation, with a view to making appropriate modifications in the concentration plan of our armies. The Minister had also asked that, in view of Article 9 of the Decree of April 3, 1906, the Chief of the General Staff (then General Dubail) be allowed to attend the meeting of the Council.

This request was not approved.

The Council of National Defence had been reorganized on July 28, 1911, and its first session since that event was to take place in October. I took advantage of this to request M. Messimy to have certain fundamental questions examined at the meeting. I represented to him that the influence which the external situation would have upon the general distribution of our forces had never yet been accurately or completely studied. By way of argument, I pointed out that the agreement between France and Italy, signed November 1, 1902, by Signor Prinetti and our Ambassador, M. Barrère, had not been communicated to the Chief of the General Staff until June 10, 1909, and that, as a consequence of the ignorance in which the General Staff had been kept during all of this period, we had continued to maintain in the Alps an important and useless army.

The Minister of War willingly fell in with my views, and, on Septem-



ber 28th, he asked the Prime Minister, M. Caillaux, to have the questions I have just mentioned examined at the next meeting of the Council of National Defence. This request met with no success, M. Caillaux having refused his consent. However, early in the next month a note was addressed to the Prime Minister couched in the following terms:

"Our war plan is a function of France's situation with regard to other nations. It is the duty of the Government to define the object to be attained, that is, furnish the foundations of the war plan, while leaving to the Ministers concerned the duty of preparing the means of its execution, and to the Generals commanding armies the business of forming their plan of operations.

"The preliminary work should be accomplished by a collaboration of all the ministerial departments. Before any war plan can be elaborated, therefore, our foreign situation ought to be clearly indicated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In return, the latter must be furnished with exact information concerning the land and sea resources of all European Powers, by reason of the influence this information may have upon our own external policy; moreover, the Foreign Office should be kept fully posted regarding the strength of our own armed forces, our finances and our military plans.

"Now, up to the year 1906, the War Ministry has had to depend for the information it needed solely upon the reports of its military attachés and personal conversations between the Chief of the General Staff and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. As a consequence, there has been no concordance of views. To furnish an example, it might be pointed out that we have for a long time maintained on our south-eastern frontier a large and excellent army, because the War Ministry had no knowledge of the existence of the Prinetti Convention.

"The Council of National Defence is charged with examining all questions which require the co-operation of several ministries; and yet, if the minutes of its meetings are examined, there will be found nothing more than a few incidental indications touching the possible attitude of Great Britain and of Italy. I believe that the time has come to do something better, and that a combined effort should be made looking to the preparation of our war plans.

"In conclusion, and as a consequence of the recent re-organization effected in the Council of National Defence, I recommend that the Ministers concerned be instructed to draw up a memorandum which will give a complete analysis of the political situation, and a summary statement as to the military strength and financial resources, of the various European countries, as well as a statement of the military and financial condition of France.

"With this information at hand the Council will be in a position to deduce the most likely hypotheses concerning the conflict, give its opinion, and prepare instructions corresponding to these hypotheses."

The Council of National Defence held a session at the Elysée on October 11, 1911, with M. Fallières presiding. I was directed to attend. The questions brought up in the note of the Minister of War were discussed.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. de Selves, stated that in his opinion

it was the business of the Minister of War to indicate his intentions and his plans in case of war; the Foreign Office could then reply by stating the diplomatic possibilities. "In diplomacy," he added, "we count on possibilities never on certainties." I replied by showing that, for example, from a strictly military point of view, our interests would suggest to us the carrying of the war into Belgium, but that, nevertheless, this question was one which lay distinctly in the domain of diplomacy. M. de Selves answered me by saying that at the moment recently when war had come so near breaking out, the question of Belgium had been discussed between the Chief of the General Staff and himself, and it had been understood that we would hold ourselves ready to march into Belgium if the Germans themselves first violated its neutrality; that in this case we could extend our operations into Belgian Luxembourg. In closing, he stated that he was opposed to drawing up any memorandum and declared that he preferred conferences between representatives of the Foreign Office and the War Ministry.

At this moment the Council was interrupted by the entrance of the Prime Minister, M. Caillaux. He immediately took the floor and strongly supported M. de Selves' method of looking at the matter. M. Fallières tried in vain to intervene, but M. Caillaux almost shut him up. Our cause was lost. The Council refused to assume the responsibilities which I believed belonged to it.

However, it was finally decided that a conference would shortly take place between representatives of the War Ministry and the Foreign Office "with a view to establishing an understanding concerning questions of a diplomatic nature susceptible of influencing operations." Another conference was decided upon between representatives of the War Ministry and the Treasury "in order to establish whether the Army had at its disposal financial resources necessary for its maintenance during the first months which would follow mobilization."

Five days later, on October 16th, I had a meeting with the Director of Political Affairs of the Foreign Office. I handed him a memorandum which was based upon the information which we had from our military attachés. The object of the memorandum was to set forth the points which it was most important for us to know. The following is a résumé of this paper:

"We consider Germany as our principal adversary. The incidents which have taken place since our defeat of 1870—the menaces of war pronounced in 1875, the Schnoebele affair of 1887, the voyage of the Emperor to Tangier in 1905, the incidents of Casablanca and at Agadir—were all brought about

by the Berlin Government. A war with Germany is therefore much the most likely, and it is the one, above all, for which we should prepare.

"Austria is bound to Germany by a Treaty signed in 1879 and published in 1888. This alliance has been renewed. By the terms of the Treaty of 1879 the *casus foederis* comes into force in case of aggression on the part of any third Power against one of the two Empires, or in case the aggression is supported by Russia. In appearance, then, this treaty has in view only defensive objects. However, Austria has become more and more closely bound to Germany, as the incident of Bosnia and Herzegovina has proved; I believe, therefore, that in all probability Austria would be ready to support Germany in the eventuality of any conflict with France, where the latter was supported by Russia: and this without asking who was the aggressor or whether it was a defensive war or not. I wish to know if the Foreign Office possesses information which confirms or invalidates this method of looking at the question.

"Somewhat numerous indications lead us to think that Roumania would join Austria, in case of war against Russia. Is there any foundation for this view?

"Coming now to Russia, the French Convention with that country states that 'in case the forces of the Triple Alliance, or of one of the powers composing it, should mobilize, France and Russia, at the first announcement of this event, and without its being necessary to concert their action beforehand, will immediately and simultaneously mobilize the totality of their forces and will move them as near as possible to their frontiers.' Should this Convention be considered to have the force of a Treaty?

"Great Britain is nervous at the development of the navy and the commercial power of Germany; this has brought her closer to France. Our general staffs have been brought into contact through the mediary of our Military Attaché, and they have examined in concert the line of conduct to be observed in case of a war with Germany. From the most recent of these conferences it results that we can expect to see 150,000 British soldiers established on our left on or about the fifteenth day of mobilization. The combined action of the two fleets has also been envisaged, the English planning to obtain superiority in the North Sea, the French in the Mediterranean.

"I would like to know whether the relations established between the general staffs are the consequence of a treaty or of a written or verbal agreement between the two Governments, or whether they are the result of a tacit consent between them. Can it be expected that *in all probability* Great Britain will support us in a war with Germany?

"Turning to Switzerland, it seems more and more evident that this country has been gained by Austrian influence and that it nourishes none too friendly sentiments towards France. It would appear, however, as unlikely that she would quit her neutrality, in view of the serious advantages which this situation comports. On her side, Germany would have small interest in violating Swiss neutrality. Austria would, in all likelihood, make her principal effort against Russia. Under these conditions, I consider that there is little occasion to occupy ourselves with the possibility of Swiss intervention.

"By reason of the shortness of the frontier separating France and Germany

and the numerous fortifications which line it on both sides, as well as the difficulty of handling large masses in the region, the Germans—and indeed the French—would have every advantage in developing their manœuvre through Belgium. Moreover, the Belgian Army would be incapable of offering any opposition to a violation of its territory. The French General Staff has never thought that it could be the first to violate Belgian neutrality. Not only would this be a denial of our signature, but it would constitute a provocation capable of alienating Russia and England. However, as a result of the information in our possession, we have reason to believe that the Germans do not intend to respect this neutrality as we do.

“In view of the gravity of the question, it would be most useful for me to have the advice of the Council of National Defence regarding the authorization to be given to the Commander-in-Chief to extend into Belgium his zone of operations the moment he learns of the violation of that country by the Germans; and again, is there complete agreement regarding the interdiction against our troops being the first to violate Belgian territory?”

“During a recent conference, General Wilson stated that his Government had made representations to Belgium and had obtained her promise to reinforce the garrison at Liège. Would it not be possible for the French Government to obtain such an increase in the strength of that fortress as would make it safe from a surprise attack?”

“In regard to Holland, the French General Staff admits that the Germans might violate the region of Maestricht: but this violation only interests us indirectly.

“The Conference of London in 1867 guaranteed the neutrality of Luxembourg. But the Grand Duchy is so much under the domination of Berlin that it is almost certain that the Germans would not hesitate to violate its neutrality. I would like to know whether we are free to take the same initiative and to prepare a manœuvre across the Grand Duchy. Would there be any diplomatic complications to be feared?”

“We recognize that the treaty binding the Powers of the Triple Alliance is clearly defensive. During the last dozen years considerable improvements in the relations between France and Italy appear to have taken place, and the Prinetti Convention was signed in 1902. On the other hand, Italian sentiment seems to be chiefly suspicious of Austria. For example, very recently, during the war against Turkey, Italy almost wholly stripped her French frontier in order to send troops to the war, while she maintained her garrisons facing Austria.

“Under these conditions, we of the General Staff consider that Italian neutrality is most probable; but we would like to know if this is also the opinion of the Foreign Office.

“The events in Morocco have produced a decided coolness between France and Spain. Last month we thought it necessary to take a few measures of precaution. Is there any secret agreement between Spain and France regarding Morocco?”

In short, the French General Staff looked upon Germany as the most probable and the most important adversary; it accepted as certain that Russia would be with us in case of war; it admitted that Austria and perhaps Roumania would join Germany; it considered as probable that Great Britain would join us; Italy, in the beginning at least, would preserve an attitude of strict neutrality; the possibility of Spain declaring herself against us was admitted; the principle was laid down that we need take no account of the neutrality of Luxembourg, but, on the contrary, we should rigorously respect Belgium, but with this reservation, that immediately the Belgian frontier was crossed by the Germans, we could penetrate into Belgian Luxembourg.

What I wished to know was whether the Foreign Office was in agreement on these points with the General Staff.

M. Bapst, with whom I had this conversation, discussed with me a certain number of the points brought out in my memorandum, but our interview brought from him nothing precise. However, on October 19th, he informed the Minister of War in writing that the Foreign Office agreed in general with the War Ministry concerning the future rôle of the Powers named in the note which I had handed him covering the hypothesis of a great war. Then, on October 20th, the Foreign Office sent us a series of notes furnishing precisions on certain points touching Roumania, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium and Spain. So far as concerned the relations between Austria and Roumania, the close intimacy existing between their sovereigns was pointed out, and the King of Roumania was quoted as saying in 1910 that "between Austria and Roumania there is no need of written conventions," while a former Roumanian Prime Minister, M. Carp, had announced that a verbal agreement existed between Roumania, Austria and Germany as against Russia. The price of this agreement was to be Bessarabia.

All these opinions made it possible to suppose that the Germans might violate Switzerland in order to turn Belfort and that, in view of the German and Austrian influence which reigned in the Swiss General Staff we should be quite ready to see Switzerland defend herself with indifferent energy.

As to Luxembourg, tied as this country was to Germany, France could make, without hesitation, any dispositions which circumstances rendered necessary; there were few complications to be feared, moreover, since Great Britain had not the same interest in the matter of Luxembourg's neutrality as she had in Belgium's. In regard to the latter country, the memorandum stated that, "it is our duty to take no initiative which



might be considered as a violation of Belgium's neutrality. But it seems certain that Germany will march her troops across Belgian territory, and in that case we should take whatever measures are required by the necessity of defending ourselves."

The feeling in Spain was represented as being quite hostile to France, but it was considered that the internal situation of the country would not permit any participation in a war against us. We, therefore, could consider as negligible any complications coming from Spain. This last point was likewise cleared up shortly afterwards by a report from our Military Attaché which reached us on October 26 1911. In a conversation which he had had with King Alfonso, His Majesty had declared that there did not exist any agreement between Spain and Germany, and that, on the contrary, he, the King, desired to pursue a policy of friendship with France; the Court of the Queen Mother were doubtless favourable to a German alliance, but this influence had no effect upon the King who, from the start, had cut short any effort at negotiations with Germany. The King had added, however, that if Spanish policy in Morocco should meet with a check, his plan of friendship with France would unquestionably be ruined.

A few days later I had a conference with the Director of Public Funds for the purpose of examining whether our Army would have at its disposal during the first months following mobilization the financial resources necessary for its maintenance. The War Ministry Staff estimated that there would be required during the first twenty days of mobilization the sum of 700 million francs; from the twenty-first to the sixtieth day, an additional sum of 1,800 millions, or a total of 2,500 million francs. I left this conference assured that all the money required would be forthcoming.

While from the financial point of view the situation was wholly clear, on the contrary, in the domain of general politics, the answers to the questions I had asked had cleared up only partly the very complex problem which was presented to us by the perspective of a war against a country which intended to respect the neutrality of Belgium only as it might suit its interests.

Without losing any time, I sent, on October 27, 1911, a memorandum to the Chief of Staff of the Army, requesting him to have immediate studies made covering the following questions:

1. The possibility of hastening the operations of mobilization in a certain number of army corps, with the idea of advancing by twenty-four days at least the date of their entraining.

2. The possibility of speeding up the movement of railway trains so as sensibly to reduce the time required for concentration.

3. The conditions under which troops from Algeria, Tunisia, and possibly Morocco, could be employed on the north-eastern frontier; instead of grouping these troops into army corps, might it not be advantageous to assemble them in divisions, each of which could be assigned to a different army? This procedure would make it possible to leave in Algeria the general officer commanding the XIX Corps, since his presence in Northern Africa might be necessary. This solution would also provide a measure of elasticity and enable the transports to succeed each other according to the political situation of the moment; it would also place at the disposal of several army commanders a division in reserve, formed of excellent troops whose prestige on the other side of the Rhine was considerable.

4. The conditions under which troops from the Alps constituting the XXI Corps might be employed. As in the case of the African forces, it might be convenient to form three divisions of Alpine troops, two of them composed of battalions of Alpine Chasseurs and the third of active troops taken from the garrisons.

5. The transport of the XIV and XV Army Corps, as well as the elements of the Alpine troops, to the right flank of the armies of the north-east, that is, to the region of the Vosges. Here their place seemed fully indicated.

6. The possibility of pushing further to the front the detraining area of the Sixth Army (army held in reserve and called the Army of Paris), so as to advance the limit of its concentration zone up to the Meuse. The replacement of the leading division of the II Corps assigned to Stenay by a division of one of the corps constituting the Army of Paris.

7. The possibility of pushing towards the Belgian frontier the detraining points of the Fifth Army, called the Army of Amiens, and of moving to the region of Givet-Fumay a division furnished by one of the corps of that army; study the modification which this change in the Army of Amiens would necessitate in the detraining plan of the three cavalry divisions called upon to operate in this direction.

8. The possibility of organizing a variation which, decided upon in advance of the period of concentration moves, would permit of the detraining north of the line Paris-Avrincourt of the two or three army corps whose points of detraining were normally fixed south of this line. (For example, the two army corps constituting the Second Army—Army of Fontainebleau—and one of the corps of the Army of Dijon.)



These instructions were based upon the following considerations:

First, it could be admitted as certain that the two belligerents would assemble face to face, separated by only a few days' march. Heavy fighting would follow immediately after concentration and would probably take place close to the common frontier. The theories which we knew to be held by the Germans made it certain to my mind that the Germans would seek to attain their objects by a pitiless offensive, having in view the early destruction of our forces. We knew that a general attack would certainly follow their concentration.

Moreover, due to the power of modern arms and the moral effects they were certain to produce, it appeared probable that the first battles would be short and that a decision would be promptly obtained. For this reason it was important to hasten the concentration of all our troops in order that we might go into a decisive battle with all our forces assembled. By reason of the short duration anticipated for the opening battles, our reserves would not have time to take part in them unless they were immediately to hand.

Now, Plan XVI and its first variation placed the reserve army—the "Army of Paris"—several days' march in arrear. As a consequence of the effort demanded of the railways, this army was required to move by road to the place decided upon for its intervention, and this movement would require several days. It was, therefore, certain that it would not arrive in the zone of operations until after the first big battle had been lost or won. For these reasons it seemed to me indispensable to push this army nearer the front, where it could more quickly intervene.

In order to prevent the first battle from being delivered on our soil, it was important for us not to be outstripped in our concentration by the Germans. Therefore, the maximum of our resources should be assembled on our north-east front, and in these should be counted our XIV and XV Army Corps from the Alps, and our Algerian and Tunisian troops. The political situation made this possible.

But the main thing was to be in a position to parry a violation of Belgian territory by the Germans. Concerning this last point, information we were receiving tended to confirm our appreciation of the probable intentions of the German General Staff. In examining, in particular, the reasons for the extraordinary development during recent years of the fortifications of Alsace-Lorraine, we arrived at very significant conclusions.

This fortified system took the following form. In Alsace, the Rhine was organized between Strasbourg and the Swiss frontier, in combination with a complete barricade of the Alsatian plain; in Lorraine, a vast

fortified region surrounded by Metz-Thionville and insured the inviolability of the Moselle between the French frontier and that of Luxembourg, at the same time providing a bridge-head on the plateaux of the left bank. Between Metz and the Vosges there remained some fifty miles of open frontier. But even this field of action was itself divided by the region of the lakes into two corridors—on one side that of the Delme, twenty-five miles wide, and on the other that of Sarrebourg, about twelve miles wide.

In trying to discover what might constitute the general outline of the German concentration and what rôle this fortified system would play in it, our studies had led us to envisage three types of concentration. The first corresponded to the case in which neutral territories would be entirely respected; the second to that in which Belgium would be violated, a defensive attitude being maintained in Alsace and Lorraine; the third presented the case of an offensive starting from Lorraine but involving a violation, limited and perhaps delayed, of Belgian Luxembourg.

The first hypothesis corresponded to the conceptions of the elder Moltke in 1870, viz., drive back the French armies towards the north by an attack on the front Epinal-Toul, combined with a secondary attack in the Woëvre. In this event, the fortified system of Metz-Thionville would play only a secondary rôle, that of an offensive bridge-head for the benefit of the secondary attack. This rôle, however, in no way justified the enormous fortifications erected in this region since 1870.

The second hypothesis transported the manœuvre into Belgium. It closely corresponded with the plan studied in a big war-game carried out in 1906 by the German General Staff, and which had come to our knowledge. In this, the rôle of the fortresses on the Moselle took on great importance. On the one hand, it strengthened the defensive front of Lorraine by threatening the flank of any French offensive which advanced between the Vosges and the fortress of Metz; on the other hand, it would serve as a pivot for the marching wing, while at the same time masking any movement of forces towards the region of Treves.

The third hypothesis would answer to the following conceptions: prevent the French from entering German Alsace-Lorraine, deceive them regarding the true German intentions; delay if possible the violation of Belgium until after a first success had been obtained. In this case it could be admitted that the manœuvre would constitute two successive periods. During the first the French forces engaged between the Vosges and Nancy would be crushed; during the second, the Belgian frontier would be crossed by armies assembled north of Treves and attacking along the

Meuse below Verdun. Under such a hypothesis, the fortifications of the Meuse seemed intended to play a fundamental rôle. The supposed arrangement would make it possible completely to conceal a mass of manoeuvre which could be thrown towards the south, the south-east, the north or the north-west. In this way the centre of gravity of the forces could be displaced at will.

Of these three hypotheses, the first seemed the least likely, because it took little account of the possible intervention of the English, while at the same time the principal German mass was directed across the difficult country of the upper Moselle. It, moreover, offered no explanation of the enormous work done during several years in the region north of Treves, or, as I have already said, of the extraordinary development of the Moselle fortresses.

The last two hypotheses, on the contrary, which postulated the detrainment of important forces in the direction of Eifel, destined to march across Belgium against the left flank of the French, amply justified the enormous amount of money expended in the last ten years for the military organization of the Metz-Thionville region.

In this way, as can be seen, a study of the rôle assigned to this fortified region led us to believe that the violation of Belgium was a likely event. It tended to explain the judgment formulated by the German General Staff in its criticism of the war-game of 1906: "The great additions to the fortifications around Metz were made in order to enable that place to aid in our operations. Forts pushed out far to the front make it possible for an army composed of a large number of corps to be assembled completely protected from the adversary and without even being seen by him, thus enabling surprise to be effected by a sudden invasion. The fortified region of Metz was not created for the purpose of being defended by an army but in order to facilitate the movements of an army within its zone."

If this was the true hypothesis, it seemed indispensable that our situation in relation to the Belgians should be cleared up, and that the French Government, accepting its responsibilities, should fix for me the attitude I was to observe. It was for this reason that during the meeting of the Council of National Defence, on January 9, 1912, with M. Fallières presiding, the following question was presented:

"At the first news of the violation of Belgian territory by the Germans, may our armies penetrate Belgian territory? Have they the right to disregard the neutrality of Luxembourg?"

After M. de Selves had announced that we had this right, the Council

replied unanimously in the sense which I had hoped for. I then stated that it was indispensable that, before the fourth day of mobilization, we be in possession of information concerning the intentions of the British: for on this date the strategic transports would start, and it would be still possible to alter the centre of gravity of our concentration.

I also desired to have approved at this meeting the general instructions based upon the studies which, on October 27th, I had directed to be made by the General Staff of the Army. I, therefore, asked the Council to decide the following questions:

1. Shall the defence of the Alps, the Pyrenees and the sea-coast be confined to units of the reserve and the territorial army?
2. Shall our active army corps all be transported as rapidly as possible towards the north-east front?
3. Shall the transport of the XIX Corps be started as soon as this corps is mobilized?

To all three of these questions the Council replied unanimously "Yes." It was at the beginning of this discussion that President Fallières took the floor to state with what pleasure he saw that at least our army had renounced the defensive rôle which constituted an avowal of inferiority. "We are resolved," he said, "to march straight against the enemy without any thought of the consequences. The offensive suits the temperament of our soldiers and ought to bring us victory, provided we concentrate against the enemy in the north-east all our active forces without any exception."

Strengthened by these decisions, I submitted to the Council the general distribution of our land forces which I had prepared, keeping in mind the aid we might expect from the Russians and the British, and taking into account the information furnished by the Foreign Office in October, 1911. The distribution was as follows:

Against Germany, twenty-two active army corps, eight cavalry divisions and twelve reserve divisions. To the Alpine front, four reserve divisions, not including the garrisons of forts. To the mobile defence of the coasts, four territorial divisions. To the defence of the Pyrenees, a detachment of the Perpignan reserve division, two territorial divisions and, eventually, the 68th Reserve Division at present assigned to Paris, and to be replaced by a territorial division.

From the British, I considered that we could count upon six infantry divisions, one cavalry division and two mounted brigades. With regard to the Russians, I believed that we could expect them to put in line twenty-eight army corps, thirty reserve divisions and twenty-seven cav-

alry divisions. Finally, there was the possibility of counting upon the Belgians to the extent of four infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions, one hundred thousand men, concentrated in the region of Brussels with their rear towards Antwerp and their front two days' march north of the Meuse.

Thus were fixed the general conditions under which it was now intended to establish our new plan of concentration and prepare our manœuvre.

I have already brought out the very important rôle which the fortification of Metz-Thionville was called upon to play during the first operations. It is essential to insist upon this point and indicate to what an extent this fortified region placed the French Armies in a dilemma. For it obliged us either to give up the initiative conferred by a strategic offensive, and accept all the risks which such an attitude entailed when faced by so resolute an adversary as the Germans, or else, if we wished to take an offensive initiative, to plunge at once into the hornets' nest that lay between Metz and Strasbourg. We could escape this dilemma in no other way than by orienting our operations towards Belgium; but this solution was permitted us only in the event of this country having been previously violated by the German Armies. And here it must be pointed out that since the period of intensive concentration transports would only begin on the seventh day of the German mobilization, it would be impossible for us to receive before the tenth or eleventh day, at the very earliest, information which would indicate to us the nature of the adversary's manœuvre.

The problem for us, therefore, was extremely difficult. I felt it my duty to inform the Government as to the possible consequences of its decision concerning the attitude we must reserve in regard to Belgium. An occasion presented itself on February 21, 1912, at the secret conference held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which lasted from 9 p.m. until midnight. The only persons present at this meeting were, M. Poincaré, the Prime Minister, M. Millerand, Minister of War, M. Delcassé, Minister of Marine; M. Paléologue, Director of Political Affairs at the Foreign Office; Admiral Aubert, Chief of the Naval General Staff, and myself. Its object was to discuss the last measures concerted between the Russian and French General Staffs for the application, in case of necessity, of the terms of the Alliance, and to set forth the nature of the secret pourparlers between the British and French General Staffs.

The Minister of Marine explained the nature of the naval arrangements arrived at between the British Admiralty and the French Naval



Staff. All operations in the North Sea, the English Channel and the Atlantic were reserved to the British Fleet, whereas the French Fleet would have charge of operations in the Mediterranean.

On my side, I informed the meeting that our conversations with the British Staff touching the land forces had taken as a basis six infantry divisions, one cavalry division and two mounted brigades, a total of one hundred and twenty-five thousand combatants. Our study had led us to agree that this army would be embarked in British and Scotch ports and would land at Boulogne, Havre and Rouen. Upon disembarking, a period of twenty-four hours in camp was provided for, after which the British units would be moved to the region of Hirson-Maubeuge. In this way our eventual allies would be prepared to start operations on the fifteenth day of mobilization.

Taking the strictly military point of view, which my duty obliged me to make clear to the Government, I then explained to the Conference that if we could conduct our offensive across Belgium—*assuming that no other consideration prevented such a course and that we could come to an understanding with the Belgian Government beforehand*—the problem presented to us would be simplified and our chances of victory would be singularly increased. Asked to elaborate this idea, I expressed myself as follows:

"In case of war with Germany, the plan which would be most fruitful in decisive results consists in taking from the very start a vigorous offensive in order to crush by a single blow the organized forces of the enemy.

"The existence close to the Franco-German frontier of natural obstacles and fortified barriers, restricts our offensive to narrowly limited regions. Alsace is closed on the north by the system of Strasbourg-Molsheim; it is bordered on the east by the Rhine, where our adversaries have fortified the bridge-heads. An offensive against Strasbourg, opposed in front and menaced on the flank, could not lead to other than the most limited results. In Lorraine the frontier is closed north of Metz by the fortified system of Metz-Thionville: it is cut up towards Dieuze by the Lake Region and closed to the east of Sarrebourg by the Vosges.

"Between the entrenched camp of Metz and Dieuze on the one side and the Vosges on the other, there exist two wide passages, the first being twenty miles and the second only twelve. It is clear that we could not operate in these corridors except with relatively restricted forces. Supposing that our attacks there should make progress, they would soon come up against organized positions in front, while being threatened in the flank by counter-offensives from the direction of Metz and Strasbourg.

"Therefore, neither in Alsace nor in Lorraine do we find ground favourable for an offensive having in view immediate decisive results.

"The situation would be infinitely more advantageous if it were permissible for us to extend our left beyond our frontier into the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. In this region we could develop all our means of action, and we would be passing far to the north of all the fortified systems constructed at great cost by our adversaries. In case of success, our armies would throw the German masses back towards southern Germany and directly menace their principal line of retreat as well as their communications with Berlin. Moreover, a movement through Belgium would make it possible for the British Army to participate more efficaciously in our operations, and the assistance of this army would bring us a marked superiority as compared with our adversaries."

From this statement of the case I deduced the conclusion that we had a major interest in feeling free to push our armies into Belgian territory, and do it without waiting until such time as the Germans had themselves violated Belgium, as it was probable they would do. I added that it might perhaps be possible to suggest through diplomatic channels to the British Government the solution that appeared to us to be the most advantageous.

The Minister of War, M. Millerand, stated that he was in agreement with my conception of the results to be expected from a plan of operations having in view offensive action across Belgian territory, and M. Delcassé, Minister of Marine, pronounced himself with equal firmness in favour of my opinions.

But the Prime Minister, M. Poincaré, pointed out that an invasion of Belgium by France would run the risk of setting against us not only Europe but the Belgians themselves, by reason of the difficulty of coming to an understanding with them beforehand; under these conditions it seemed essential that our entrance upon Belgian territory be justified at least by a positive menace of German invasion. Indeed, it was this fear of an invasion of Belgium by the Germans which, in the first place, had led to the military agreements with Great Britain. We, therefore, had to be sure that a plan based upon a march by us through Belgium would not have for its effect the withdrawal of British support from our side.

Then, basing himself on the purely diplomatic standpoint, M. Poincaré declared that the British Ambassador, in a recent conversation with him, had expressed the fear that our military agreements had reached the ears of the Germans, and had furnished them with a pretext for increasing their land forces. Sir Francis Bertie had at the same time also



clearly indicated that in his opinion the Franco-British Entente was just as useful to his own country as it was to France. Lord Haldane, while at Berlin, had reserved England's liberty of action in the case of Germany attacking France. The Prime Minister added that there was every reason to desire that the military agreements might receive diplomatic consecration.

In closing, M. Poincaré asked me about the arrangements made on our Italian front as the result of the secret agreement of 1902. Replying to this question, I explained that even if Italy should immediately take sides against us, she would be unable at the beginning to put in the field more than six army corps, and that these could not reach our frontier before the eighteenth day of mobilization, too late, therefore, to exercise any influence upon our first operations against Germany. Hence, it would be a great mistake on our part to leave army corps of the active Army on our south-east front; it was quite sufficient to anticipate the case in which, the first battles remaining indecisive, the French and German armies would find themselves obliged to reorganize before starting the struggle anew. Our object, therefore, was to prevent the Italians from debouching from the mountain zone to the plain before such time as the Russian Armies had begun to make their action felt effectively; that is to say, before the end of the sixth week. To obtain this result, four reserve divisions reinforced by thirteen reserve Alpine groups, supported by our fortified places, seemed to me quite sufficient, especially in a region so eminently favourable to the defensive.

The Minister of Marine then informed us of the plan by which the French fleet in the Mediterranean would immediately move against the Italian fleet at the very beginning of mobilization. This fact was probably known in Italy, and would in all likelihood contribute to induce that country to conform to the agreement of 1902; or in any case it would cause the Italians to effect their mobilization only with a wise tardiness which would prevent their having to compromise themselves. The Prime Minister fully shared in this opinion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. Paléologue, who took notes during this deliberation, has communicated to us, from his unpublished record, a remarkable prophecy of General Joffre's as to the duration of the future war.

The Director of Political Affairs had been explaining to the Conference that he was engaged in studying the means of furnishing to the public treasury the resources which would be required to meet the enormous cost of a war.

"If the war were to be of short duration, for example four or five months, as many persons believe, the actual amount now in our treasury would be sufficient. But if the war were to last long, very long, as others affirm, we should have to undertake the project of a vast loan, to be negotiated in New York upon the opening of hostilities, in order that our enemies might not get ahead of us in the American market. I would therefore ask

What took place at this important Conference, all of whose details remain engraved in my memory, leads to the following conclusions:

In the first place, the menace of a German invasion coming through Belgium not only had not escaped me, as has been so often asserted, but it appeared so probable that I obtained an agreement from the Government as to the right I would have to march into Belgium the moment that that country was violated by our enemies. In the course of the discussion, as has just been seen, the Prime Minister, M. Poincaré, in spite of his natural prudence went even further than I had expected, in admitting that intervention of our armies on the other side of the neutral frontier might be justified by a "positive menace of German invasion" through Belgium.

However, what was to be understood by "positive menace"? While a German concentration in Rhenish Prussia might denote an evident intention of penetrating Belgian Luxembourg, the assembling of troops between Treves and Malmédy might be considered merely as a measure of precaution against an invasion of Belgium by France. Therefore, while the conference of February 21, 1912, resulted in stating the problem, it did nothing to solve it.

The symptomatic phrase which M. Poincaré pronounced in the course of this meeting deserves elaboration. The Prime Minister without doubt had in mind all the warnings which the British had given us concerning Belgian neutrality. In 1906, when the first conversations took place between British and French military men, we had formally promised to respect the neutrality of Belgium, and about this same time an authorized voice<sup>2</sup> had warned us in these words: "Do not let yourselves be tempted to enter Belgium upon a simple threat from Germany; it might be in the interests of that country to push you towards such a step."

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General Joffre to tell us what, in the present state of Europe, is likely to be the duration of a great war."

The General replied:

"On this subject I have two hypotheses. *First hypothesis: we are victors at the outset.* I estimate that it will take us at least six months to reach the Rhine. Then, and then only, will commence real national resistance on the part of Germany, the entrance upon the scene of all the Powers, an indefinite duration. . . . *Second hypothesis: we are defeated at the outset.* I estimate that I could maintain for four months our retreat on the Morvan. Then, and then only, will commence real national resistance on the part of France, the entrance upon the scene of all the Powers, an indefinite duration!"

"Then, in accordance with either hypothesis, you foresee an indefinite duration!"

"Yes, in accordance with either hypothesis, an indefinite duration." (Editor's note.)

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. Repington. In 1911, Lord Esher had again voiced the same warning.

Nevertheless, I have reason to believe that after the declarations I made during this meeting in February, 1912, and following a suggestion originating with M. Poincaré, the British Foreign Office made a study of the question I had brought up. Indeed, I learned that the British Military Attaché in Brussels, Colonel Bridges, during the year 1912, tried to open a conversation on the subject with General Jungbluth of the Belgian General Staff; but this exchange of views never got further than formulating the question as to what dispositions could be arranged in common for meeting the case of a violation of Belgian territory by Germany. Even on this reduced basis the conversation thus started never reached any result.

On November 27, 1912, General Wilson, with the approval of Lord Grey, came to the French General Staff and informed us that the Foreign Office believed "that Belgium was hesitating as to the attitude she would take in the case of war between France and Germany, and that she seemed to incline rather to the German side. Now," he added, "if France should be the first to violate Belgian neutrality, the Army of Belgium would certainly join the Germans and the British Government would then be called upon to defend the neutrality of that country. This would place us in a very embarrassing position; therefore," he concluded, "the French Army has no interest whatever in being the first to violate Belgian neutrality."

This communication was of the very highest importance for it obliged me definitely to renounce all idea of a *manceuvre a priori* through Belgium.

It also seemed advisable to examine what would be the state of mind of the Belgian people in case of a violation of their country's neutrality. In 1911 a little book had appeared which attracted my attention. It was entitled *The Situation of Belgium in the Event of a Franco-German Conflict*. It was signed with the nom-de-plume "O. DAX" which, it was said, concealed the name of an important military personage. The closing words of this book were as follows: "If the occasion arises we must not hesitate so to direct events as will cause our alliance with the stronger of the two belligerents to be justified by the facts."

This opportunist conception in no way surprised me, for many capable observers thought that at the beginning of hostilities the Belgians would confine themselves to assembling their forces under the shelter of Liège and Namur, and, in this way, make preparations for joining the victorious party.

I also tried to learn what arrangements the Belgians had made to ensure

the security of the Liège-Namur front, and especially the safety of these two fortified towns. In December, 1911, the Intelligence Bureau of our General Staff informed me that Liège was liable to be captured by a surprise attack if made before the third day of Belgian mobilization. Starting with the fourth day, the measures contemplated for the defence of the place seemed sufficient to force the enemy to make a more serious attack. Experience had proved that in moments of political tension, as in 1911, for example, the Belgians took the precaution of reinforcing the garrison of the forts. Information concerning Namur was less favourable and it led me to anticipate the possibility of having the forts occupied by our 1st Infantry Division, in case the Belgians authorized us to move our forces into their territory. I had a study made of the question from which it appeared that this division could be concentrated on the fourth or fifth day, either between Jeumont and Maubeuge, or,—if it were possible to use the Belgian railway lines—between Jemmapes and Charleroi. In the first case the division could be at Namur the morning of the seventh day; in the second, the evening of the fifth, since Jemmapes was only seven miles away.

Another element in the Belgian problem was presented by the re-organization of the Army, to which M. de Brocqueville, Prime Minister, was devoting all his energy. After long and patient effort he succeeded, on August 30, 1913, in getting the Belgian Parliament to pass a law re-organizing the Army. But the provisions of this law could not bear full fruit until the expiration of ten years. During the discussions, M. de Brocqueville had, moreover, declared that the Belgian Army thus organized was intended "to turn the balance in favour of that one of the Powers which had not been the first to violate the neutrality of Belgian territory."

I will now examine our situation in regard to Russia. To do this, we must first go back to the secret Military Convention which bound us to our Eastern Allies. This document was signed at St. Petersburg on August 17, 1892, by General Obroutcheff, Chief of the Russian General Staff, and General de Boisdeffre, then Chief of Staff of the French Army, who had been sent for that purpose on a mission to Russia. The Czar and the French Government approved this convention in December, 1893. Being one of the consequences of the Triple Alliance, it was to run for the same length of time. In 1899, after new *pourparlers*, the application of this agreement was considerably extended, since the two Governments declared that "being anxious to maintain a general peace and an equilibrium between European forces" they had decided together that

this Convention would remain "in operation for the same length of time as the diplomatic agreement drawn up for the protection of the common and permanent interests of the two countries."

It would seem useful to set down here the text of this Convention:

"France and Russia being animated by a common desire to preserve peace, and having no other object than to make the necessary provisions in case of a defensive war provoked by an attack on the part of the forces of the Triple Alliance directed against one or the other of them, have agreed upon the following dispositions:

"(i) If France is attacked by Germany, or by Italy supported by Germany, Russia will employ all her available forces to attack Germany. If Russia is attacked by Germany, or by Austria supported by Germany, France will employ all her available forces to oppose Germany.

"(ii) In case the forces of the Triple Alliance, or one of the Powers comprising it, should mobilize, France and Russia, upon the announcement of this event and without it being necessary to come to a previous agreement, will immediately and simultaneously mobilize the totality of their forces and transport them as near as possible to their frontiers.

"(iii) The available forces which would be employed against Germany shall be on the part of France, 1,300,000 men, and on the part of Russia from 700,000 to 800,000 men. These forces shall be fully engaged and as rapidly as possible, so that Germany will be obliged to fight in the east and in the west at the same time.

"(iv) The General Staffs of the two Armies of the two countries will keep in constant touch for the purpose of preparing and facilitating the execution of the measures above set down. They will, even in time of peace, exchange all information relating to the Armies of the Triple Alliance which is or may become known to them. The best means for corresponding in time of war shall be studied and provided for in advance.

"(v) Neither France nor Russia will conclude a separate peace.

"(vi) The present Convention shall remain in effect for so long as the Triple Alliance continues.

"(vii) All the clauses enumerated above shall be kept rigorously secret."

When I took over the functions of Chief of the General Staff, in July, 1911, we knew that the mobilization and concentration of the Russian Army would be very slow, on account of the paucity of railroads in the country, their limited efficiency and the small amount of rolling stock. Therefore, when General Dubail, then Chief of Staff of the Army, started for Russia in midsummer of 1911 with the object of conferring with the Russian General Staff in conformity with paragraph IV of the Military Convention, one of the principal objects of his mission was to represent to our Allies the serious inconvenience which would result from the delays consequent upon their deficiency in railways. He was



fortunate enough to secure, on August 18th/31st, a formal engagement on the part of the Russians to do everything possible to hasten their mobilization and concentration. Our Allies agreed not to wait until their Armies were completely concentrated before acting. The offensive would be taken the moment the first-line forces were in position, and it was calculated that, owing to these measures, the Russo-German frontier could be crossed on the sixteenth day. It was also fully agreed by both sides that only a vigorous offensive could bring success.<sup>3</sup>

This was a first and most important result. The following year it was the turn of the Chief of the Russian General Staff, General Gilinsky, to come to France. He arrived on July 6th, the day following the celebrated interview between the Czar and the Emperor William in the Baltic. General Gilinsky was accompanied by Admiral Prince Lieven, Chief of Staff of the Russian Navy, and the latter on July 16th signed with Vice-Admiral Aubert, Chief of Staff of the French Navy, a Naval Convention analogous to the Military one.

After an exchange of views regarding the plan to be pursued by both the Allied Armies, General Gilinsky on July 13th made an agreement that the Russian Armies would begin their offensive on the fifteenth day by operations undertaken on the wings, having for their object the freeing of the Russian dispositions in the centre. For it must be remarked that the form of the Russian frontier was not favourable to a defensive against an Austrian attack debouching from Galicia, since the latter, moving from the south towards the north, would take in reverse the lines of the Niemen, the Narev, the Pilica, the Vistula above Warsaw, and the Bug. Therefore, if the first Russian operation was to be directed offensively, as we had requested, against the front Koenigsberg-Thorn, it was essential that at the same time a part of the Russian forces should penetrate into Galicia, in order to straighten out the front and neutralize the offensive which the Austrians would probably start from this most convenient base.

It will be observed that the Military Convention in its earliest form required that the two Allies should completely and with the utmost diligence engage all of their mobilized forces.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the reasons which would logically push us to seize the initiative of operations on our front by as prompt an offensive as possible, the determination faithfully to carry out the terms of the Convention also inspired the same attitude; indeed, it can be stated that the conviction of our desire to take the offen-

<sup>3</sup> Deposition of M. Messimy before the Briey Commission.

<sup>4</sup> Article 3 of the Military Convention of August 17, 1892, quoted above.



sive and of our faithful attachment to the clauses of the Convention, which the Russian Staff observed during every interview with our General Staff, strongly contributed to induce the Russian Military Chiefs to intensify their own efforts. If they had found us less decided, there is small doubt that our Allies would have been more guarded in their action at the outbreak of war.

This was the situation, when in September, 1912, the Grand Duke Nicholas came to France to attend our grand manœuvres in Poitou. At that time I had never met the man who in 1914 was to be Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armies.

The Grand Duke Nicholas Nicolaievitch, Commander of the Imperial Guard and the Military Circumscription of St. Petersburg, was born in 1856; he was the son of the Grand Duke Nicholas (third son of the Emperor Nicholas I) who had been at the head of the Russian Armies in 1877-78 during the war against Turkey. Physically he was very tall, slender and vigorous and he had the reputation in Russia of being an intelligent and energetic chief, thoroughly informed on all military questions, knowing and loving his profession, and constantly preparing himself for the important rôle he would have to play in time of war.

Many intelligent observers regretted that during the unfortunate Manchurian campaign the Emperor had never called upon him to re-establish a situation which at no time had been desperate. It was asserted, however, that while the Emperor admired and loved the Grand Duke for his upright, sterling and independent character, he was a little apprehensive of him.

From the opening of my relations with him I had reason to congratulate myself that the fate of the Russian Army henceforth lay in his hands; events proved that he fully merited the eminent position to which the Emperor had called him, and I feel honoured to think that from this time onwards I continued without interruption to be his friend.

After the manœuvres were over and he was taking leave of me, the Grand Duke very kindly invited me to return his visit the following year and to take part in the coming Russian manœuvres. I, therefore, on August 3, 1913, left for St. Petersburg, accompanied by Generals d'Amade Dor de Lastours, Desaleux, Hély d'Oissel, Delarue, Colonels Dumesnil and Berthelot and Major Renouard.

We were received with the warmest cordiality by the Emperor and the Grand Duke, and during the three weeks of our stay I had numerous conversations with the latter. I profited by these to urge upon him several times the necessity which I foresaw of speeding up the Russian

mobilization and of thus starting as quickly as possible an offensive with that fraction of the Russian Armies which had been immediately mobilized; the essential motive underlying my request was the overwhelming probability that the concentration of the larger part of the German forces would be directed against us.

The Grand Duke assured me that my request would be satisfied. He fully understood the necessity of the Russian Army taking the offensive rapidly, whatever risks such an attitude might seem to involve; for it was essential to bring some relief to our front at any price, supposing that the Germans would attempt at the opening of hostilities to crush our forces. The event proved in what a generous and loyal manner this great gentleman kept his word; I feel it my duty to say this here, and I will have occasion to repeat it further on. France should never forget the service which our Allies rendered her.

In addition to these conversations, our stay in Russia was very useful through the exchange of ideas which took place between the officers of our Mission and their Russian comrades. Some of the latter, full of zeal, desired to learn from us a thousand things. In particular, the Grand Duke Serge, Grand Master of Artillery, took a great fancy to Lieutenant-Colonel Dumesnil of our Artillery, hardly ever leaving him and asking him innumerable questions as to how French artillerymen proposed to solve the various problems of the field of battle.

Unfortunately, in spite of the sympathetic reception given us we realized that there was a group of persons around the Czar who, though very kind in all they had to say to us, regretted to see the Rulers of Russia so frankly casting in their country's lot with France. The Minister of War, Soukoumlinoff, was an outstanding example. He promised everything we asked but kept his word in nothing. I will not say anything further regarding this man, who died in Berlin after the war closed.

During the time we remained at the camp we were present at numerous manœuvres. These seemed to us organized above all with an eye to effect, and the realities of war were not sufficiently taken into account. The troops presented an excellent appearance and the men seemed vigorous and carefully drilled.

These various contacts with the Russian Army gave me a fairly precise knowledge of what our Allies would be able to do. I knew that besides the 27 active army corps, Russia would be able to mobilize 28 reserve divisions. Thanks to the considerable improvement made in various directions, it was to be expected that on the fifteenth day of mobilization corps along the frontier would be assembled and ready for work. Eight

or nine corps would be facing Eastern Prussia on the front Kovo-Grodno-Warsaw and seven corps would be facing Galicia on the front Lublin-Cholm-Rovno. By the twentieth day, the group of armies of the north-west, facing Germany, would amount to eleven army corps, the one of the south-east to nine corps. In addition a reserve army of four corps could be assembled in the region of Brest-Litowsk. Therefore, it would only be between the twentieth and twenty-third day that twenty-four out of twenty-seven active army corps would be in a position to give full force to the offensive. By the twenty-sixth day the greater part of the reserve divisions could be detrained in their zones of concentration.

The principal offensive had the German Army for its objective. This was assigned to the group of armies of the north-west, which would direct its main forces against Allenstein and Thorn, while at the same time its right wing would move from the Niemen against Koenigsberg. The southern group of armies would have as its objective the Austrian Army in Galicia.

No one could fail to see how delicate would be the situation of the Russian Army, or fail to appreciate that, by consenting to an important offensive before concentrating all of its forces, it was giving proof of great self-denial. From Warsaw to Kovo is 225 miles. To undertake an offensive with eight or nine corps along such a front was full of risks. The handling of this mass along so wide a space was very difficult; and the armies could not mutually support each other, for they were separated not only by great distances but also by the numerous rivers and lakes which filled the region. A German Army, even if inferior in strength, but concentrated, could easily penetrate the cordon of Russian Armies stretched in front of it—and particularly in the direction of Thorn-Warsaw—by combining its action with an Austrian offensive directed from Przemyśl against Brest-Litowsk.

It, therefore, seemed that the Russian masses assembled in Poland, on the Narev, with their main body in the region of Warsaw, would be better placed to stop the German attacks coming from Thorn against Warsaw. Moreover, starting from the central region of Warsaw, the main Russian forces would be in a good position for either taking the offensive towards Allenstein, or manœuvring by the left bank of the Vistula with a view to marching against Berlin.

In short, the Russian concentration seemed too much extended in width and its centre of gravity too far towards the north, while the forces in the centre were being detrained too far to the rear as compared with those of the wings.

In my opinion it was necessary for the concentration to be carried out more rapidly, for up to the twenty-third day the nine army corps of the north-west group and the seven corps of the southern group would find themselves facing the enemy alone; it was only on this date that the offensive effort could be marked by any great intensity. This delay was very long, for we wished to ensure the simultaneousness of the Russian and French attacks; but if it was to be shortened, serious changes in the Russian railway system would become necessary.

Unfortunately, such transformations could be effected only after long study and much work, and this would completely upset the Russian mobilization and plan of campaign. As it turned out, when the war started Russia was in just the same military situation as when we saw her in August, 1913.

It is now time to set down what we knew regarding the German forces and the intentions of our adversary. In 1912 it was generally admitted that the mobilized German Army would consist of twenty-three active army corps, three newly formed army corps, a certain number of reserve units, six fortress divisions and eleven cavalry divisions. As a matter of fact, up to August 25, 1914, a thick cloud hid from us the number, the formation and the method of using the German reserve units.

The German plan of mobilization which was brought into effect on April 1, 1914, prescribed that reserve troops would, in principle, be employed from the very beginning of hostilities in the same way as active troops: for this purpose each active army corps was expected to give birth to a reserve corps.

Up to this time we had been convinced that the Germans would assign to their reserve troops only tasks of secondary importance, very much in the way we expected to use ours. "No fathers of a family in the first line," as William II had put it, and his words had been repeated in the Reichstag in June, 1913. The phrase seemed to accord with the theories favoured at this time by the German Army, where it was considered that success must be based upon the intense violence of the first encounter. We were, therefore, justified in accepting that our adversaries would not entrust the fate of the first battles to manifestly inferior troops.

When the new German plan of mobilization came to my knowledge, it caused me a great deal of uncertainty. However, in view of the fact that the German reserve army corps possessed only a relatively small number of guns at the outbreak of the war, I was inclined to believe that these corps would be placed in the second line and would be employed only

for laying siege to fortified places, for guarding communications, defending passive fronts, and occupying conquered territories.

It must be here acknowledged that this error into which we were led bore heavily upon the manner in which we organized our concentration, and consequently it gravely affected the opening operations. This will be seen farther on.

During the years which preceded the war the German army had been very greatly strengthened. The law of June, 1912, had quickly borne fruit. While we had under arms only 519,000 men, the Germans had 657,000. In 1912 Germany had called up 551,000 reservists as against 456,000 in 1909. Until the law of 1912 went into effect, the German Army counted only twenty-three army corps in time of peace, whereas, after October 1, 1913, it was composed of twenty-five corps, the XXI Corps being at Sarrebruck.

We, of course, had known for a long time of the German plan to double the number of army corps on mobilization. But, as the Minister of War had declared before the Reichstag, this operation was recognized as being very delicate. However, the formation in time of peace of two army corps with reinforced effectives to cover the frontier, was calculated to place our adversary in a very strong position.

More especially the creation of the XXI Corps at Sarrebruck constituted a menace that was hardly even disguised. This corps placed near the frontier at only two days' march from the region of Nancy and having a strength which made it possible to take the field at once, gave a most disquieting superiority to the German covering forces, which, up to this time, had been about equal to our own.

At the beginning of 1913 we learned that a new military law was projected in Germany which was destined to complete and improve existing units, improving their war value by increasing the number of officers and non-commissioned officers and by reinforcing their active elements. For example, the six army corps which lined our frontier would have their effectives increased. This led us to foresee the possibility of a sudden attack carried out during the early days of mobilization or even the very first day, supposing that our adversaries had succeeded in concealing the initial operations of their mobilization. It also seemed certain that the rest of the German Army would effect its concentration in a much shorter time than had been heretofore prescribed. Now, the three French army corps which mounted guard on the frontier had a too marked numerical inferiority as compared with the five German corps which faced them. It is explained in Appendix to Part I (p. 592) how the Three-



Year Law passed by the French Parliament July 7, 1913, made it possible for us to parry this danger which so gravely threatened our covering forces.

Having thus sketched what we knew of the German Army, it is now important to indicate the hypothesis which we made as to the German plan of operations.

In the first place, it was quite possible that the German General Staff would revive the plan of the elder Moltke—documents which have appeared since the war show that they considered it—and make their principal offensive against Russia, while, at the start, observing simply a defensive attitude on the Western front. It was evident that under this hypothesis the Germans had no interest in violating the neutral territories of Belgium and Luxembourg and that the right of their strategic deployment would stretch no farther than the region of Treves. In such a case, in view of our engagements, Belgium would likewise have been prohibited territory for us.

This plan offered Germany incontestable advantages. Above all, it rendered the intervention of the British at our side quite improbable. This solution condemned us to the deployment of all our forces between Luxembourg and the Vosges, with the redoubtable position of Metz in front of us.

Another hypothesis was that the Germans would first take the offensive against us, while preserving a defensive attitude in face of the Russians until such time as the decision had been obtained on the Western front. Under this hypothesis it was almost certain that the Germans would violate the neutrality of Belgium. But by doing so they would open up to us the only ground on which we could develop a manœuvre of our armies.

In this case, the question arose as to how great an extension would be given to the German operation. A map exercise executed by the German Great General Staff in 1905, in which the movement of the German right wing across Belgium was studied, had come to our knowledge. In this exercise the German right flank did not reach as far north as the Meuse at Namur and Liège, and while this document possessed only the value of a theoretical study, it constituted, nevertheless, something of an indication.



and Namur, the Germans would be inclined to restrict the breadth of their movements to the regions of the Meuse.

I also considered that a more complete violation of Belgium would certainly bring the British into the struggle, because of the menace against Antwerp; whereas, if it were limited to the south of the river, it was possible that they would remain indifferent. Moreover, in making use of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and of Belgian Luxembourg, the Germans would get possession of fifteen highways and three railroads; this seemed amply sufficient for transporting the forces which they would assign to their right wing.

In fact, we admitted—and this was especially the sentiment of General de Castelnau—that the Germans would not place their reserve units in the first line. "If this be the case," he said, "unless they extend their front dangerously, or make it too thin for any vigorous action, it would be impossible for them to march north of the line Liège-Namur."

I confess that after a long reflection I came to the same opinion. However, I did not reject, *a priori*, the hypothesis of a wider German manœuvre to the north of the Meuse. But in such a case I had a right to expect the co-operation of the Belgians and of the British.

Such, then, were the ideas we had conceived as to what the Germans could do. Later on, during a conference at the Foreign Ministry, on October 12, 1912, I was asked, if a conflict took place, to state what would be the respective situations, according to our reasoning and information, of the French and German forces on the north-east front. I replied that supposing we could not count upon British support but could count upon forming an army corps taken from our Alpine troops and made available by Italian neutrality, and supposing likewise that we brought over the XIX Corps from Algeria, our active forces would be approximately equal to the corresponding German elements. In the event of the British joining us, our forces would be distinctly superior to those of the Germans.

In regard to the German reserve formations, whose number and composition were not exactly known to us by reason of the changes then going on in the German Army, I stated that it was not possible for me to give indications which would serve as a basis of comparison with similar units of the French Army.

It may be interesting to quote here the figures I thought myself justified in giving in support of the estimate set forth above. They are as follows:

We estimate that in the matter of the active army the Germans would

send against France from 550 to 600 battalions, 350 squadrons, 500 to 550 field batteries of six guns, 24 horse batteries of four guns and 100 foot batteries of four guns.

To oppose these forces we would have, including troops of the XIX Corps and an army corps formed of Alpine units, 580 active battalions, 332 squadrons, 653 batteries of four guns and 42 heavy batteries. It should here be noted that reinforcements sent to the Expeditionary Corps in Morocco had reduced our forces available against Germany by 12 battalions and five field batteries; besides these, the Colonial Army Corps, as a result of the numerous demands made upon it to form provisional units for Africa, now had only a feeble nucleus of active troops.

At this time I estimated the possible reinforcements coming from the British at 73 battalions (three being mounted infantry), 45 squadrons, 60 batteries of six guns and 24 heavy batteries.

But, shortly afterwards, the reinforcement of the German Army changed the eventual conditions of the struggle. It was this new situation which brought France back to the Three-Year Service Law.



#### CHAPTER IV

*Plan XVII (A)—Ideas which served as the basis for the plan of concentration*

AFTER having recalled the atmosphere in which we lived during the years just preceding the war, I now intend to give the genesis of Plan XVII.

Before I undertook the studies necessary to fix my ideas as to the possibilities of manœuvre, I determined to examine the ground on which the operations would probably take place. Therefore, in the spring of 1912, I sent two officers of the General Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Duport and Major Barthélemy to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and southern Belgium to make reconnaissances. Both were instructed to study the terrain under prescribed hypotheses. At this time, as I have already said, I still hoped to be able to make use of Belgium for our defensive operations, and while this hypothesis was not realized, the reconnaissances were not without value.

They showed me that one of the characteristics of both regions consisted in a sort of separation into compartments which presented most serious difficulties for the conduct of a united action. However, as a matter of fact, neither the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg nor Belgium proved to be less favourable than the north of France and the country around Charleroi, cut up as these regions were by numerous fields and hedges and dotted with villages and important towns all rendering the movement of armies difficult. Indeed, the wooded zones of the Grand Duchy and of Belgian Luxembourg seemed to me rather favourable to the side which, like ourselves, had a considerable inferiority of heavy artillery but a manifest superiority in field guns.

I will now set down the ideas which served to fix my decisions from the point of view of concentration and the point of view of operations. I will do this with entire sincerity, giving without any reticence all the ideas which animated me at the time, even when events later on proved them to be mistaken.

In the first place, we all believed that the War would be short. In this matter everybody was wrong—civilians, soldiers, strategists, diplo-

mats, economists and financiers. Foch himself, in his admirable book on *The Principles of War*, had stated that "the armies which will take the field will be composed of civilians snatched from their families, the war will upset everything, normal life will cease completely, and as a consequence the struggle cannot last long." In the "Regulations for the Conduct of Large Units," drawn up by a board presided over by General Pau we read "In the present form of war, the size of the armies which will be put in the field, the difficulties of supplying them, the interruption resulting in the social and economic life of the country, all point to the necessity of bringing about a decision as quickly as possible with a view to promptly ending the struggle."

The same ideas prevailed amongst the Germans. General Schlieffen, Chief of the Great General Staff up to 1906, in a series of important articles published in 1909 declared that the war would end after the first battle. In addition to arguments of an economic nature, he pointed out that the pacifist tendencies characterizing most European peoples would lead rapidly to a curtailment of the time during which hostilities could last. "The moment any war begins to turn out unfortunately," he said, "the Government of the country concerned will have to count upon a current of opinion which will drive it towards accepting peace." I will leave to those more qualified than I am the easy task of discovering in the writings of politicians, financiers and economists, opinions similar to those I have just quoted.

Starting out from this idea that the war would be short, everything possible had to be done to concentrate all the nation's strength into that decisive battle which General Schlieffen considered would be the beginning and the end of the war. If the idea could be contested that the first great encounter could end the war, there would be no doubt that general actions would closely follow the completion of detraining and that by no trick of manœuvre would it be possible to delay these early combats. More especially it was evident that covering troops, even if sacrificed, would be powerless to effect any postponement. Therefore every mobilized unit belonging to the first line should be sent to the scene of action so that all could simultaneously participate in the first encounters. There could be no longer any idea of transporting distant reserves to those points where the turn of events rendered them most useful. Therefore, the essential principle which guided me was the following: Assemble every available man for battle.

The second basic idea which guided me was this: Seize the initiative. In the first place, this attitude would prevent French territory from being

invaded and becoming the theatre of the first battles; it would permit us to preserve our freedom of action and would prevent our manœuvre from being dominated from the start by the enemy's decision; moreover, this attitude conformed to the military conventions entered into between the French and Russian General Staffs.

I was also firmly convinced that it was impossible a long time in advance to fix on any definite manœuvre, for there were too many unknown quantities, all of which had to be taken into consideration. As Lord Kitchener had said, our strategic policy must of necessity be opportunist, and before the Briey Commission I made the following statement: "Our plan can only be made by basing our calculations upon events as they take place and upon information which is received as the operations unfold. No immutable plan can be established and applied no matter what happens; our plan can only be drawn up a few days after mobilization, when events have taken shape; it can take form only little by little following the information, diplomatic as well as military, which we receive after mobilization."

Many unknown factors entered into our political situation and we could not be certain as to the German intentions. The essential thing was, when the moment came, to have all the troops united and ready, assembled in such order as would correspond to each possible solution. In my opinion, therefore, our concentration must be considered simply as an initial disposition of forces made with a view to adaptation to any plan of operations; it could not be established to correspond to a plan drawn up *ne varietur*. The concentration must be so elastic as to permit of any subsequent manœuvre and all possible combinations. These, of course, must be carefully thought out and prepared by the Commander-in-Chief, for, by reason of the proximity and size of the forces confronting each other, it was essential that he should have prepared his manœuvre in its main aspects at least. In this way he would not be caught unawares, since it was not a question of attaining geographical objectives but of meeting the enemy under conditions previously determined.

The intensive period of German transports would only begin on the seventh day of mobilization; hence it would only be on the tenth or eleventh day, at the earliest, that we could receive information of a nature to give us an idea of their plan. Therefore, unless we were ready to accept a defensive strategic attitude with all its attendant risks, we were obliged to draw up a preliminary plan without this information, provision being made, naturally, for modifications capable of execution as



information arrived. But a preconceived plan of operations was made impossible for us through the unknown factor represented by Belgium.

For all of these reasons there never was any plan of operations set down in writing, and besides, I was answerable to no one in this respect.

A plan of operation is, in fact, essentially the personal work of the Commander-in-Chief. No plan of operations has ever been drawn up by the General Staff of the Army; its work is limited to preparing the concentration. The plan is established under the sole responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief, no one being authorized to require of him that it be given official communication with a view to discussion or approval. Any attempt of this kind would constitute a most serious weapon in the hands of those who constantly point out the dangers of governmental interference with military operations. Our various generalissimos had differed considerably in their views regarding this responsibility; some of them, for instance, General de Lacroix, had semi-officially explained his intentions to the assembled War Board. Others, like General Trémeau, had discussed the subject directly with the commanders of armies, but with them only; others, such as General Brugère, had refused to give any explanations on the subject. For my part, I consider the last as being the preferable attitude.

I, therefore, determined to delay my decision as to the manœuvre to be undertaken until the first days following the declaration of war. I adopted no preconceived idea, other than a full determination to take the offensive with all my forces assembled, qualified by the necessity, before deciding on the strategic manœuvre, of waiting until the various European Powers had defined their attitude, in order that questions of territory might be cleared up. In short, I was reduced to a conception that was a *posteriori* and opportunist, to make use of Kitchener's phrase, which would be based upon what took place during the first days of the war.

It is for this reason that I feel justified in asserting that no *complete* plan of operations was ever set down in writing. To go even further, when I signed Directive No. I, concerning which I will be led to speak later, my collaborators strongly urged that by a word I should indicate that the hypothesis I had envisaged in that Directive was not the only one possible. I refused, considering that in such a document, which would be communicated to the British, there ought not to be in any form whatsoever any allusion to a manœuvre taking place across neutral territory.

I, therefore, decided to limit our studies to a concentration capable of lending itself to any possible plan of operations.



When it came to determining the general zone of our concentration, it should be remarked that lack of ground made it difficult conveniently to place the large masses of men which would be moved to the frontier; while the restrictions imposed by the location of railway lines and of detraining points compressed within narrow limits the changes which could be effected in the boundaries of this zone. However, the various plans of operations which suggested themselves did not differ greatly in regard to the assembling of the different armies, except in the matter of density and the arrangement of the forces within the zone selected.

The effectives to be placed in line were out of proportion to the extent of the Franco-German frontier; and yet it was upon a width corresponding to this frontier that the concentration of the French Armies had to be effected. It was apparent that the line of the Meuse below Pagny and that of the Moselle above Toul, where our great fortified places were located, was the only front behind which our concentration, protected by covering troops, could take place. This line seemed to me close enough to the frontier to prevent our armies from losing the time which had been gained in their assembling and it restricted the extent of territory which would have to be abandoned to the enemy in case we were obliged momentarily to assume a defensive attitude.

Protected by this barrier, our armies could detrain in complete security, group themselves according to the plan of operations which I should by that time have chosen, and then form up either to receive the enemy or to undertake offensive operations.

This solution appeared to me a favourable one, for it placed us in a central strategic position for either an offensive or a defensive facing east, in the event of the enemy debouching directly from Alsace-Lorraine. Should he march against Paris through Belgium we would be in a position to operate, facing north, against his left flank, and if he passed through Switzerland, facing south, against his right flank. These flanking positions would prevent the enemy from marching straight before him against a geographical or political objective and oblige him in each case to make a difficult change of front.

If the fighting elements of the active corps were separated by about two days' march, the conditions for uniting our forces would be satisfied, while at the same time space would be given in which they could manoeuvre. The quais and other facilities for detraining were numerous enough along our transport lines to make such a distribution possible. All these considerations led me to decide that in the central part of the zone of concentration the fighting elements of the various army corps

should be maintained in front of the general line running through Luxeuil, Neufchâteau, Saint-Dizier and the line of the Aisne up to Attigny.

On each wing of the concentration zone the depth would be greater, in order to enable us to be prepared to meet a violation of Switzerland or of Belgium. If the Germans should make a diversion through the south with a view to turning Belfort, the diversion would necessarily be slow. We could, therefore, content ourselves with assembling on the right wing, between the Saône and the Doubs, an army composed of reserve divisions, capable of holding the enemy by making good use of the slopes of the Jura, and by defending, if necessary, the middle course of the Doubs, supported as they would be by the fortified places of Belfort and Besançon.

The region of Vesoul appeared suitable for the concentration of this army, for, placed as it thus would be, equally distant from Epinal, Belfort, Morteau, it would be able to follow behind our active corps in the direction either of Lorraine or of Alsace, in case the Germans respected the neutrality of Switzerland.

On the left wing of the zone of concentration, it seemed that an initial distribution extending to the region between Mézières and Hirson would answer every need, without its being necessary to extend farther than this last place; the British Army, of course, being assigned the duty of forming the extreme left echelon of our forces. In case of offensive operations taking place in Belgium and developing towards the north as far as Dinant, this left echelon might reach the Meuse near Dinant by a three days' march, and as quickly as if it had started from Avesnes or Maubeuge. It would also be well placed for following the main body of our forces supposing the enemy refused his right and our offensive should have to be pronounced south of the difficult region marked by the line Paliseul-Saint-Hubert-Houffalize. In case we should be temporarily reduced to a strategic defensive this region still seemed suitable, for our left could vigorously oppose the enemy who, in order to avoid the obstacle presented by the Ardennes Forest, would have to move against either Sedan or Dinant. In case Belgium's neutrality should be respected by the Germans, this echelon would be directed towards Luxembourg. It is true that under this last hypothesis the rear-most fighting units would be at Hirson, four days' march from the heads of columns. But this inconvenience presented no great importance if account was taken of the other facts under consideration and of the necessity of being ready at all

times to meet an out-flanking manœuvre of the enemy through Belgian Luxembourg.

Turning now to the British Army, in view of the impossibility of prolonging the two lines of transport assigned to it, only two divisions could be concentrated between Hirson and Mézières, the other divisions detrainning between Hirson, Avesnes and Nouvion, the cavalry and artillery between Landrecies and Maubeuge. Therefore, Hirson would be the centre of gravity of the British concentration. This situation had as its consequence the increase by two days' march of the distribution in depth of our general disposition; moreover, it aggravated the inconvenience resulting from the late detrainning of the British divisions, which would be ready to move forward only between the fifteenth and sixteenth days, or even later, supposing the beginning of the French and British mobilizations did not coincide. Therefore, as long as the conditions governing the transport of the British troops had not been improved it was hardly possible to count upon their intervention during the initial operations.

Such were the considerations which determined the general outline of our zone of concentration, under the supposition that we would be able to execute our mobilization and carry out our strategic transports in conformity with the plans as made.

It was certain that a serious delay in mobilization or a series of accidents on the railway line, occurring during the period of transportation, would profoundly modify the problem. In this case the zone of concentration of our armies would have to be drawn back and we would be obliged to return to the plan of a strategic defensive based upon the fortified system which General Séré de Rivi re had constructed. Our covering forces, reinforced as far as possible by cavalry and the first divisions made ready, would then defend the line of forts and delay the enemy in his crossing of the Meuse and the Moselle, while our armies waiting for him at the outlets of the corridors running between the fortresses would be ready to attack him in front and on the flank. In this case the concentration of the French forces would take place behind the general line Aisne-Ornaien-Faucilles; the concentration of the British Army and that of the army in reserve would be left unmodified. This would result in giving us the possibility of a base for a counter-offensive in right-angled formation.

The general zone of concentration being thus determined in its principal lines, it now became necessary to provide for the disposition of the forces within the zones, in order to make it possible for the General Staff to prepare the concentration. I again insist upon the fact that in my mind

there could be no question of making dispositions established *ne varietur* and to be set into operation automatically. In 1866 Moltke had several times modified his plan of operations and his plan of concentration. In 1870 he twice changed his detrainning plan. Napoleon himself, whose concentration was effected by road marches, had time in which he was able finally to assemble his army in the form corresponding to the manœuvre he had in view. Now, in 1912, our railway system had acquired sufficient elasticity to make it possible, even during the course of concentration, to modify the grouping and destination of our forces.

In order to provide a starting point for the preparatory studies of the General Staff, what was required was an *average* distribution of our forces within the zone of concentration whose boundaries had been established in the way I have just described. To accomplish this, I had to present the staff with a preliminary study of the various plans of operation which seemed to me compatible with the situation.

These projects divided themselves into two categories only, those based on a strategic offensive and those based on a strategic defensive. In each category a distinction had to be made between those cases in which the belligerent armies would respect the neutrality of Belgium and those in which their action would be effected across Belgian Luxembourg. My problem consisted in adapting the plan to circumstances as they arose, and for this I started with the following ideas as a basis:

Since the strategic manœuvre of a group of armies always comprises a principal operation and secondary ones, it was the nature and the object of the principal operation required which served to establish the difference between them. It seemed to me possible to assign zones for the assembling of the various armies which would have a form sufficiently general to serve as a basis for all manœuvre solutions, while I reserved for myself, by the use of reserves, the possibility of reinforcing or enlarging whichever one of these actions seemed destined to become the principal operation. I thus considered that by choosing the point of application of the forces destined for one or the other of these possible actions, it would be possible for me to give to the manœuvre, when the moment arrived, the breadth and the form which appeared to me most suitable. By reason of the uncertainty of the situation I saw no other way of solving the problem.

Now, as a result of the separation of the frontier zone into compartments separated one from the other by important obstacles, our offensive, the moment it penetrated enemy territory, would find itself compressed into narrowly limited regions where our armies could develop only a

portion of their means of action. Under the hypothesis that the neutrality of Belgium would be respected the question was, should our forces attack along the corridors of Sarrebourg of Château-Salins and of Luxembourg and of these alone? They measure respectively only 9, 20 and 16 miles in width, and an offensive undertaken in Alsace, where an impasse faced us, could only have for its object a diversion conducted with relatively feeble forces.

I answered that we *must attack against all of the three portions of our Lorraine frontier* not only for the purpose of fully using the narrow space which lay at our disposal, but in order to fix the enemy along the whole front and keep him in uncertainty as to what form our decisive effort would take.

The next task was to choose amongst the three corridors to which our attacks were restricted those in which we should push our efforts until a rupture of the enemy's battle dispositions had been effected; for it was in rear of the most important of these attacks that there should be massed the forces charged with supporting the troops in the first line, defending their flanks and completing their success.

The object of the principal attack might be to effect the definite separation of the enemy's forces acting in Alsace from those co-operating in Lorraine. In this case we could push to the limit our offensive in the two directions of Sarrebourg and Château-Salins, taking Sarreguemines as the general objective.

The more northern effort might likewise have for its object to encircle the enemy forces united in the region of Metz, drive them into the entrenched camp of that place and try to invest them there. In this case we would be obliged to conduct a double offensive by Luxembourg in the north and the corridor of Château-Salins in the south, these two actions being joined together by an operation which would be the first step in blockading the fortified group of Metz-Thionville.

In the first project our two offensives, although separated at the start by the lake region, were closely associated one with the other. Directed as they were against the point of junction of the German armies of Alsace and of Lorraine they would be acting in common against a weak point in the enemy's dispositions and might produce a rupture of their centre. If the offensive succeeded, the Germans could not reform except in the valley of the Rhine. But, on the other hand, in the course of this operation our forces would be liable to be taken in flank by attacks coming in all probability from both Metz and the region of Molsheim-Strasbourg. By penetrating like a wedge into the midst of the enemy's lines we would be



more or less inviting envelopment. It was, therefore, indispensable that, as our progress in German territory developed, we cover our menaced flanks by more and more forces.

In short, the risks to this manœuvre were considerable, while the results could hardly be considered decisive, since, in case of success, the most we could hope for was to push back the principal masses of the German armies in Lorraine towards the Rhine and north Germany, that is to say, along their normal lines of retreat. In the project of a dual offensive through Château-Salins and Luxembourg, the principal effort would be directed against the centre and one wing of the enemy. He could operate against the flank of our northern offensive only by violating Belgian neutrality; but if he decided to do this we would have the right on our side to develop our action in Belgian Luxembourg by simply extending our dispositions, since our left, as has been seen, would be especially strong and considerably distributed in depth. If the attack of our wing through the Grand Duchy resulted in a success, part of the German armies in Lorraine might be shut up in Metz; in this case the exploitation of our victory in a northerly direction would bring us upon the lines of retreat of these armies and permit us to push them back into south Germany.

However, I did not conceal from myself that this plan presented serious inconveniences. First, there was the impossibility of deploying important forces towards the north without violating Belgian territory; this would oblige us to seek a solution through the combination of two attacks, which would be separated by the fortified zone of Metz-Thionville; in fact, there would be two distinct actions between which co-ordination would be difficult to establish. In the second place, to debouch into Luxembourg might be difficult; in any case, the chances were that it would be a lengthy operation, should the adversary occupy a position intended to threaten us with envelopment. While delaying our offensive in the north the Germans could act with the main body of their forces against the army debouching upon Château-Salins and Faulquemont and thus presenting its right flank to enemy attacks from the region of Sarrebourg. Finally, any success of German forces, debouching from the Vosges and from Sarrebourg against our right in the direction of the Moselle corridor would have the effect of placing us in a difficult situation, since the principal mass of our armies would thus be exposed to being cut off from the rest of France.

As can be seen the advantages and inconveniences of these two manœuvres appeared to balance each other.



It now remained to summarize the secondary operations common to the two projects. These may be defined as follows:

1. Blockade of the western front of the fortified region of Metz-Thionville, and of the southern front of Metz between the Moselle and the Seille.
2. Protection of the left flank of our dispositions against an attack coming from Belgium.
3. Protection of the right flank against German forces in Alsace, and, in case of need, against troops which had violated Swiss territory and were seeking to make a diversion in the region south of Belfort.

Under the hypothesis of an offensive through Sarrebourg and Château-Salins in the direction of Sarreguemines, our attack through Luxembourg would be a secondary operation, having for its object the attraction towards the north of the troops massed at Metz as well as keeping the enemy forces of Prussian Rhineland in place and preventing them from moving down into Lorraine. Inversely, under the hypothesis that the principal operation would be based on an offensive through Château-Salins and Luxembourg, the attack on the Sarrebourg corridor would have for its object to hold the enemy in place and prevent the troops in Alsace from being sent to Lorraine. Therefore, both of these projects indicated the necessity of an offensive along each one of the three corridors, and, therefore, the constitution of three armies, those on the wings, moreover, comprising in addition important elements—fractions of armies—charged with protecting their flanks. The blockade of the western front of the fortified region Metz-Thionville, by reason of its importance, should be confided to an army having at its disposal a group of reserve divisions. The blockade of the southern front of Metz between the Moselle and the Seille; of especial interest to the army charged with the offensive through Château-Salins, would be assigned to an army to which a group of reserve divisions would be allotted for that purpose. Finally, an army would be held in reserve to reinforce either the Château-Salins offensive or that through Luxembourg, as might be decided upon. The troops from Africa, the Alpine garrisons and the divisions temporarily kept in the interior of the country would constitute a last reserve to be employed as circumstances might direct.

To fulfil these conditions the distribution of our forces might take the following form:

An army of four corps, charged with the offensive against Sarrebourg and the covering of the right flank.

An army of four corps, reinforced by a group of reserve divisions,

charged with the offensive through Château-Salins and the blockade of Metz between the Moselle and the Seille.

An army of six corps and a group of reserve divisions, charged with the blockade of the western front of Metz.

In reserve would be the following:

An army of three corps in the region Metz-Verdun, ready to support the northern portion of the plan adopted.

An army of three divisions behind the right wing, ready to strengthen the protection of the right flank by moving towards the Vosges or towards Alsace, or by opposing any German diversion in the Jura.

An army of four or five divisions behind the left wing, ready either to reinforce the principal action through Luxembourg or to meet an outflanking movement of the enemy through Belgium, or to reinforce the Third Army (for example) in effecting the blockade of Thionville.

Finally, the British Army, echeloned behind our left, would cover our flank, or else would be ready to extend our action towards the north and possibly move through Belgium.

The zones of concentration of the various armies were given the following boundaries:

The Army of the North would extend southward as far as the line Spincourt-Varennes; the army intended to invest Metz-Thionville, as far as the line Toul-Dieulouard; the army of Nancy, as far as Manonvillier-Bayon; the army of Epinal to the south of this line, as far as Belfort; the army of reinforcement on the right would be organized in the Vesoul region, that of the left behind the Army of the North, the reserve army in the region Bar-le-Duc.

The second hypothesis to consider was that in which it would be possible to develop our manœuvre through Belgium. Without recalling here all the advantages which this manœuvre would bring us, it must not be forgotten that the Prime Minister had admitted that an intervention of our forces on the other side of the neutral frontier might be justified by a *positive menace* of a German invasion of Belgium, always providing that we were assured of the assent of the British. It was, therefore, legitimate for me to envisage the case in which, an agreement with Great Britain having been established on this subject during the first days of hostilities, we could put into operation a plan based upon the violation of Belgian neutrality.

I was conscious, moreover, that since the agreement of Great Britain was problematical and subject to political considerations, it was impos-

sible to base, *a priori*, a strategic offensive upon eventualities which might very well never materialize.

However seductive at first, from a military point of view, might be a plan based upon an offensive in Belgium, such a scheme involved considerable risks. To begin with, the intervention of Belgian forces against the left flank of our armies might prove particularly dangerous, if the Belgians had arranged to combine these operations with that of a German mass moving to meet us across Belgian Luxembourg. It is true that in this eventuality we could count upon the opportune arrival of British contingents, which would offset this menace.

The situation would be still more disquieting if the Germans, completely refusing their right wing, obliged us to cover considerable distances before being able to deliver battle. Our adversaries would thus place themselves out of reach of the British forces, which could not attack in the Treves region before the twenty-sixth day of the British mobilization. This situation would cause us to lose most precious time, which the Germans might put to profit by vigorously attacking our armies in Luxembourg. If they succeeded in defeating our right in the region of Nancy and to the south, while our armies in Belgium, finding at first nothing in front of them, had not yet obtained any results, they would place us in a critical situation, presenting some analogy with that of the month of September, 1870.

In any offensive project based upon an immediate invasion of Belgium, this essential consideration could never be lost to view. For it is evident that a French army on the left wing moving from the region Mézières in the general direction of Malmédy to attack German forces detraining south of Aix-la-Chapelle, in the course of its march might very well have to modify its direction, supposing that the enemy slipped away towards the Eifel region, north of Treves. Admitted that this army started its movement the twelfth day of mobilization and met no obstacle on its road, it would not reach the Kill towards Gerolstein and Killbourg before the twenty-second or twenty-third day, that is to say, a week after the operations in Lorraine and in the Woëvre had taken place. This date would be considerably retarded if enemy rear-guards opposed our columns from successive positions in the particularly favourable region of the Ardennes.

This example shows how important it was in any plan of manœuvre not to lose time and not to extend our disposition towards the north, at the beginning of operations and before possessed of full information. It would have to be the measures taken by the Germans during their con-

centration which would indicate to us the limit it seemed suitable to give to this extension. If the German concentration was effected principally in Lorraine, it would be to our interest at the start to use in Belgian territory only the space necessary to facilitate our movement in the general direction of Treves, while maintaining the possibility of gaining ground towards the north, if circumstances required it.

It was in this way that my studies brought out the difficulties with which, in practice, a plan for an offensive through Belgium would be faced. A most extreme precision would be necessary in the application of the strategic manoeuvre, if the deployment of our left armies was not to take place either too soon or too late.

Taking into account the peculiarities of the region, it seemed to me that the essential object of an offensive through Belgium was to reach and destroy, by passing to the north of the fortified system Metz-Thionville, the enemy armies whose detrainning would be effected in the triangle Metz-Thionville-Treves.

Depending upon the information which would be received, and following an extension towards the north of the German forces, the principal operation indicated for the group of armies in Belgium would consist of a march either against Luxembourg or against Saint-With, the left resting on the Belgian Ardennes. In case of success the enemy would be pushed into the Eifel region, while a part of our forces, crossing the Moselle above Thionville could take in flank and in reverse the German armies in Lorraine.

If, on the contrary, our adversaries refused their left wing and directed their principal mass towards Lorraine, our armies of the north would take the shortest direction towards Treves, would force the Moselle below Thionville, and, as quickly as possible, would take in flank the main body of the German forces. Subsidiary operations would be undertaken to facilitate the principal attack; some would have for their object to cover the flanks of the French armies in Belgium, others the maintaining of the enemy in Lorraine and in the Vosges. These operations would comprise, north of the line Nancy-Toul, the investment of the left front of the entrenched camp of Metz, to prevent the enemy from invading the Woëvre; the blocking of the fortifications of Thionville on the left bank of the Moselle; the covering of the left flank of the French armies by the occupation of the Belgian Ardennes, this last operation supported by the action of the British Expeditionary Force which, following circumstances, might march either through Dinant against Verviers, or through Neufchâteau and Bastagne in echelon behind our left.

South of the line Nancy-Toul our effectives would be largely sufficient to prevent the enemy from debouching between Epinal and Toul. I anticipated that this part of our forces would maintain a defensive attitude. However, if the Germans did not themselves attack in Lorraine, our army would advance in order to pin the enemy down and force him to bring up his reserves.

To accomplish these various missions I decided upon the following assignment of our forces:

*A principal group*—"The Belgian Group," for the offensive north of Thionville.

*A secondary group*—"The Lorraine Group," to hold the enemy south of the line Nancy-Toul.

*A central army*—uniting these two groups and charged with investing the western front of the entrenched camp of Metz.

In my view, the principal group should comprise two armies strong enough to furnish the necessary detachments for the protection of its flanks. One of these armies, formed of six corps and a group of reserve divisions, would march offensively against Saint-With or against Treves; the second army of five corps, with the addition possibly of two reserve divisions, would operate against Thionville, or farther north between Luxembourg and Thionville, its right blocking Thionville.

By reason of the extent of the front between Nancy and Belfort I was led to divide the Lorraine group also into two armies. One comprised of three corps and three reserve divisions, would maintain the enemy between Nancy and the line Châtel-Manonviller; the other of four corps would operate to the south of this line as far as the Vosges. I contemplated also placing a group of three reserve divisions assembled in the region of Vesoul to cover the right flank of our armies. The central army would comprise two corps, with a group of three reserve divisions, its mission being to blockade the western front of Metz. The British Army in all cases would act in concert and in close liaison with the group of French armies in Belgium. Finally, the troops from Africa and the Alps would form a general reserve which I could use according to circumstances to reinforce the Belgian group or the Lorraine one.

After having determined the general rôle of our forces under this hypothesis, and their grouping, I then had to fix the zones of concentration of these various masses in order that the General Staff might prepare the details of their concentration.

To the Belgian group of armies I assigned as a front of concentration the course of the Meuse from Mézières to the south of Verdun; to the



Lorraine group, the line of the Lower Meurthe and the heights between the Moselle and the Mortagne, the right being at Hautes-Vosges; the central army was to be concentrated as far forward as possible, in order to commence without delay the investment of Metz.

I requested the General Staff to work upon these lines as a basis.

These studies had clearly brought out to the full the importance of the fortified region of Metz-Thionville. Under the hypothesis that we would be prevented from moving through Belgium, it would constitute the principal danger to our offensive in Lorraine; in case we could pass through Belgium, it would enable the Germans to move supports from Lorraine towards the Eifel region; in any case, placed upon the two banks of the Moselle and penetrating like a wedge into French territory, it brought powerful support to any German offensive, whether only partial, consisting of a sudden dash undertaken at the start of hostilities, or a general offensive begun after the concentration had been completed.

It therefore seemed to me indispensable to find some way of offsetting the offensive power of this fortified region. The solution I decided upon consisted in throwing forward during the first days of our mobilization, in front of our military frontier marked by the Hauts-de-Meuse, a sort of temporary stronghold which the enemy in debouching from the region of Metz could in no case disregard.

I also considered that, in case we respected Belgian neutrality and that an offensive in Lorraine was necessary, our fortified system would no longer correspond to our offensive requirements, however great its defensive value. Of course, if we had no other intention than that of awaiting the Germans as they came through the spaces voluntarily left in our fortified system with a view to canalizing the invasion, the barriers of the Hauts-de-Meuse and the chain of the Ballons would still be capable of rendering the services for which General Séré de Rivière had conceived them.

But our north-eastern fortifications were at present required to facilitate the offensive departure of armies destined to attack in Lorraine, by opening before them convenient outlets. Now, except perhaps in the regions of Verdun and Epinal, our fortified system was not capable of playing a rôle analogous to that which the Germans assigned to the group Metz-Thionville. From this point of view, the substitution of Toul for Nancy as a "lockhead" south of the Hauts-de-Meuse seemed to me particularly regrettable. Placed amidst the forests of Hage and of La Reine, Toul did not assure us the possession of any important outlet, and if the Germans succeeded in installing themselves on the Couronné



de Nancy we would be obliged to open the campaign by difficult and costly operations in order to recapture the line of the Meuse.

It was evident that, for budgetary reasons, it was impossible to contemplate any serious modifications in our organizations. Therefore, I directed that studies be made as to the use of temporary defensive organizations, especially around Nancy and in the region of Hattonchâtel, to be combined with the measures which I had in view to offset the offensive power of Metz.

It was manifest that all these defences could not be established soon enough, unless during time of peace a detailed reconnaissance was undertaken and minute preparations made.



## CHAPTER V

### *Plan XVII (C)—Preparations for Executing the Plan*

AFTER having explained how the problem presented itself and in what fashion it seemed to me logical to solve it, it now remains to state by what processes these various projects passed from the domain of study to that of realization.

In the autumn of 1912, when it appeared to me more and more imperative completely to recast our plan, I was obliged to call a halt; for the plan in preparation was based upon proposed changes in our organic laws and, while these had been submitted to Parliament, it was impossible to construct anything definite until we were sure that they would be passed.

This was the situation when, on October 24th, I handed M. Millerand, then Minister of War, a note in which I explained the urgent necessity of remodelling the plan of concentration, and, as a consequence, the need of hastening a vote on the bill reorganizing the army which had been submitted to Parliament. In this note I explained that Plan XVI, which came into effect March 1, 1909, was based upon a foreign situation which no longer existed and involved plans of operations which present conditions invalidated.

The following difficulties in this plan seemed evident: the complexity of railway movements prescribed for the XIV and XV Army Corps, which had to be prepared for transfer in two directions—towards the north-east and towards the Alps; the too great rigidity prescribed for the movements by rail; the reliance upon an army of manœuvre to be moved by road towards one or other of the wings of our concentration, thus running the risk of not being ready to intervene at the decisive time and place. Moreover, Plan XVI made insufficient provision against the eventuality of a German offensive directed through Belgium.

Without doubt the Variation adopted in September, 1911, under the pressure of events had considerably improved the situation, but it still presented the defects of an extemporized solution.

"The foreign situation," I added, "has become profoundly modified.

The changes in the Russian Army brought about by the Manchurian War only commenced in 1908, but they will soon be completed. The heavy field artillery will soon be up to strength and the equipment for reserve troops is on hand. England appears more than ever inclined to support us, and in July, 1911, the War Office decided to send to the continent not merely a part but the whole of its field army, while taking steps to hasten its mobilization and transport. The collaboration of the two navies is assured. In regard to Italy, there is reason more and more to hope that she will not seriously intervene in a war against France; in any case her intervention would not be immediate."

As a consequence of this situation, it had become possible to leave in the Alps only formations of reserve units and, from the very start, to have the XIV and XV Corps towards the north-east, adding to them later on the covering troops left on the Italian frontier. The transport of the XIX Army Corps to France could now be certainly counted upon. On the other hand, Germany had been obliged to take precautions in respect of her eastern frontier and this had led her to create the XX Army Corps at Allenstein.

Moreover, the capacity of our railways had been considerably increased. The number of train-loads had been increased from forty-eight to fifty-six, and all the work along the lines would be finished in 1912. Thanks to this intensification, it would be possible to gain a day in the concentration of the fighting units. Other work, it was expected, would be completed partly in 1913 and partly in 1914, and would result in still greater elasticity and permit the grouping of army corps in the zone of concentration exactly as might be decided upon by the High Command.

On the other hand, recent information indicated much activity on the part of the Germans in improving the strategic railways in the Eifel region as well as increasing the number of entraining points in the area east of Malmédy. "This proves on the part of the German General Staff," I added, "a tendency to push farther and farther towards the north the right wing of their concentration, and to embrace Luxembourg and Belgium in the theatre of their operations."

I ended my report by saying that our present concentration did not correspond to the foreign situation, to the strength of our forces or the capacity of our railways. It seemed to me that it did not lend itself to movements in connection with an offensive which would have to be undertaken in Belgium in the event of a violation of that country by the Germans. For all these reasons a new plan appeared to me necessary, but it was indispensable that it should be based upon an army organiza-

tion previously sanctioned by law. "Now, Plan XVI, the study of which was begun on August 2, 1907," I concluded, "could not be put into effect until March 1, 1909, or 17 months later; we now estimate at 14 months the time necessary for establishing the new plan; if, therefore, it is desired to put it into effect in the spring of 1914, the laws re-organizing the infantry, cavalry and engineers must be voted at once, so that we can commence our preparations by the beginning of 1913."

However, I did not permit myself any illusions in regard to this matter. Taking into account the delays of legislation and the time required for the material elaboration of a new plan, I fully realized that it could not be put into effect in the near future. It, therefore, appeared to me necessary once more to have recourse to a provisional solution which, by improving the conditions of concentration, would enable me when the time arrived to execute whatever manœuvre I should have decided upon. It was wholly evident that Variation No. 1, which I had approved in September, 1911, was not sufficient to attain this object. I will recall here that, if faced by the eventuality of the violation of Belgium by the Germans, I had decided to take advantage of the increased flexibility of our transport system to reinforce our north-east wing by transferring troops from the south-east, thus carrying our left still further to the north. I also planned to push in the same direction the "Army of Manœuvre" and close the reserves, constituted by the groups of reserve divisions, nearer up behind the first-line armies. The Sixth Army, the Army of Manœuvre, would, however, still be left echeloned between Châlons-sur-Marne, Rheims and Sainte-Menehould, with the foremost troops in the Argonne. Now, I have already shown that a manœuvre through Belgium would not strategically be possible if any time were lost. The distance away of the Sixth Army was, therefore, incompatible with the necessities which might arise.

Consequently, I gave instructions for a Variation to be prepared comprising the proposed organic modifications, and based on the 2-year service. By this Variation, the cantonments of the most advanced corps of the Sixth Army were to be moved farther east, with a view to accelerating and facilitating the movements of this army beyond the Meuse and north of Verdun. Two main conditions were laid down by me to provide, in the first case, for the non-violation of Belgium, and, in the second, for movements for one reason or another on Belgian territory. In the former event, the army was to be able to debouch in an easterly direction, crossing the Meuse between Verdun and Stenay. In the latter, the Meuse was

to be crossed between Dun and Sedan, and the army would take a north-easterly direction.

The result of these studies was to move forward the concentration of the Sixth Army up to the line Grand-Pré-Varennnes-Clermont-en-Argonne. A proportion of III and IV Corps troops would already be beyond the forest of the Argonne, while the X and XI Corps would be in the plain of Champagne.

I have also said that the absolute inviolability of the Meuse front was a necessary condition for a strategic move through the Grand Duchy or through Belgian Luxembourg. In addition to this it was indispensable to take steps in the Woëvre to limit the offensive possibilities of the Metz-Thionville position.

Now, to the north, the buttress of our positions was Verdun, and in this direction it was necessary to strengthen the occupation of the Hauts-de-Meuse. Accordingly, it was decided that the eventual occupation of this position, between Damvillers and Hattonchâtel, should be entrusted to the 3rd group of reserve divisions, whose concentration area was in consequence fixed on either side of Verdun, instead of between Sainte-Menehould and Bar-le-Duc as had been laid down in the Variation of September, 1911. This involved the following modifications in the composition of the 3rd and 4th groups of reserve divisions; the 4th group, whose concentration area was not altered, now comprised the 51st, 60th and 62nd Reserve Divisions; the 3rd group was made up of the 52nd, 53rd and 54th. Of these latter, the 52nd was to be concentrated on the Meuse, between Stenay and Dun, the 53rd in the area Varennes—Montfaucon, and the 54th between Dieue and Troyon on the Meuse. These two important modifications of the concentration areas for the Sixth Army and 3rd group of reserve divisions constituted what was known as Variation No. 2 of Plan XVI. It took some five months to draw up and co-ordinate all the necessary documents, so that the new Variation was only brought into force in April, 1913. We were then able to await, under more favourable conditions, the complete remodelling of the Plan.

A study of the successive changes in the original Plan XVI, which were brought about by Variations 1 and 2, will show that the predominating influence had been the increasing importance we attached to an eventual violation by the Germans of Belgian territory. In view of this menace, the centre of gravity of our forces in the north-east was moved more and more to the north. It will be noticed, however, that no extension north of the Mézières region was provided for under Variation No. 2. This

was due entirely to the numbers at our disposal; it must not be forgotten that the 2-year law was still in operation.

On the other hand, the idea of a defensive attitude had been discarded and we had arrived at a truer estimate of the action that could be taken against an enemy concentrated on the frontier itself. The result was that we were able to contemplate abandoning as small a strip of national territory as possible at the outbreak of hostilities. This explains the fact that, in each successive plan, the concentration of the main body of our forces was fixed nearer the frontier. In Plan XVII, this idea was to be still further developed.

Moreover, our reserve formations were being re-organized on better lines and with a view to greater elasticity, so that we could count upon employing them earlier alongside active troops. Finally, in the course of the elaboration of these different variations, it was seen that the moves and concentration themselves could be improved and simplified.

It was found possible, more particularly, to simplify the regulations governing movements by rail. Up to this period, the time-table and route of each train had been laid down from start to finish, necessitating at every station a separate slip for each train that passed, and the detraining stations were definitely fixed in advance. All this was too rigid and entailed very long and detailed work. It was decided to settle the route of each train only up to the Regulating Station. This latter was to settle, in accordance with the capacity of the system under its control, the final route and detraining station.

The five months' work of preparing Variation No. 2 had been of great use, in that it enabled improvements to be made later on in the conditions governing the execution of Plan XVII.

In the meanwhile, the *cadre* laws submitted to Parliament were to constitute the basis of a radical re-organization of the army. In particular, the essential object of the law concerning the infantry was the better organization of reserve troops, and the employment of certain reserve divisions with the first-line armies.

The law relating to the *cadres* and strength of the artillery was promulgated on December 13, 1912. In agreement with M. Etienne, President of the Army Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, the Minister of War (M. Millerand) exerted himself in getting the respective laws passed as rapidly as possible. That concerning the infantry was voted by the Chamber on December 12th and by the Senate on the 21st, without discussion. The law regarding the cavalry was accepted by the Chamber



on December 20th, but the Senate did not finally adopt it until March 27, 1913. This law provided for the majority of the cavalry regiments being grouped in divisions.

By the end of 1912, therefore, I was satisfied that our new plan of concentration could be based on our forecasts of the general re-organization of the active forces and reserve units.

At this period, however, fresh circumstances arose which entailed further consideration of parts of the plan which had first been elaborated.

The law which the Reichstag had voted in June had already borne fruit. Our covering force, as contemplated, was no longer calculated to check the thrust of the five enemy corps which would be opposed to it. An increase up to five army corps was necessary in order to reduce the probability of a sudden attack or, in any case, if such an attack was delivered, to be in a position to meet it. These considerations, as I have already said, convinced me that the recruiting law of 1905 was no longer adequate, and that by a law of 3-year service alone could the covering troops be brought up to increased strength, and those in the interior maintained at normal strength.

On March 4th, the 3-year law had been approved in principle by the War Board. On April 18th, in accordance with Article 3 of the Decree of July 28, 1911, regarding the re-organization of the High Command, I submitted to this Board the detailed bases of a new plan, which was to be known as Plan XVII. In this document, it was shown that, in view of the foreign situation and our own military situation, a new plan was required. The proposed organization of the mobilized army was then set forth. This can be resumed as follows:

The cavalry being grouped in divisions, only one regiment of 6 squadrons would be allotted to each army corps.

The reserve infantry brigade, heretofore assigned to each army corps, was to be done away with. Although these brigades had little fighting value, both manœuvres and map exercises had shown that corps commanders were frequently prone to treat them as active units and to employ them on work where much cohesion was necessary. Under the new infantry organization, these regiments were to be reduced from 3 to 2 battalions and their organization improved. The new plan, therefore, provided for one reserve regiment of 2 battalions being allotted to each division.

In regard to the artillery, it has to be acknowledged that nothing had come of the studies undertaken on July 19, 1911, when the War Board decided in favour of the creation of heavy artillery. As I have previously

said, the only important change was the invention by Major Malandrin of an apparatus enabling fire to be directed, against protected works, up to an angle of descent of  $12^{\circ}$ . The new plan, therefore, effected no change in the former organization of the corps artillery.

Plan XVII provided for 21 army corps, including the Colonial Corps and a XXI Corps to be constituted at Epinal.

The mobilization of the XIX Corps could not be contemplated, owing to the requirements of Morocco. Provision in Plan XVII was, therefore, made for two independent divisions, the 37th and 38th, to come from Algeria.

The normal army corps was to consist of 28 battalions, including 4 reserve, 30 batteries and 6 squadrons, including 2 reserve.

The 14th region might provide one division of 16 battalions.<sup>1</sup>

The active army, on mobilization, would consist of 46 infantry divisions, the same number as in Plan XVI.

For the cavalry, the new plan provided for 10 divisions, each consisting of 6 cavalry regiments, one group of three 4-gun batteries, and one infantry cyclist group.

A reserve infantry division was to be composed as follows: 2 infantry brigades each consisting of three 2-battalion regiments, 3 groups of 3 batteries, 2 squadrons. The new plan provided for 25 reserve divisions instead of 22 as in Plan XVI. Each reserve division would only have 12 battalions, as against 18, but it would be more handy and easier to manœuvre. In Plan XVI, all the reserve divisions were, at the outset, to be kept far back, so as to give them time to settle down properly; their employment in the initial fighting was not contemplated. They were, however, better organized now, with a stronger proportion of artillery to infantry, and it seemed possible to employ them, under certain conditions, alongside active units. It was for this reason that, in the Variation of September, 1911, to Plan XVI, provision had been made for moving some of these divisions farther forward.

In regard to the heavy artillery, the army artillery provided for under Plan XVII, comprised groups of 3 or 4 batteries each of 4—6.2 inch guns C.T.R.<sup>2</sup>—in all 26 batteries. The mobile heavy artillery, consisting of 15 batteries of 4.8 inch long guns and 6 batteries of 8.8 inch howitzers, was allotted to the group of armies of the north-east. An increase of this allotment was contemplated as fresh deliveries took place.

<sup>1</sup> This division was to be numbered 43rd. After the creation of the XXI Corps it became the 44th.

<sup>2</sup> C.T.R.—Rapid fire counter-battery.—Trans.

With regard to the Air Service, this new arm was to be represented, as from the spring of 1914, by 13 airships and 20 squadrons of 6 aeroplanes each, distributed among the armies. Studies were being carried out with the object of organizing sections of light aeroplanes for the cavalry divisions and the corps artillery. There were contemplated, in addition, sections of aeroplanes specially equipped for attacking hostile airships and for dropping explosives and projectiles.

The territorial divisions were intended for the defence of Paris, the coasts, the south-eastern frontier, etc. They were to consist of 12 battalions, 3 or 6 batteries and 2 or 4 squadrons.

The fortress garrisons had, up to this time, been composed of active units. The new plan provided for the employment in active operations as soon as possible of the 24 battalions (regiments Nos. 164 to 173) allowed to the 4 large fortresses. Provision was made for their move, which would be effected as soon as they had been replaced by reserve or territorial units.

The plan for the defence of North Africa comprised:

1. Coast defence garrisons at Bizerta, Algiers and Oran.
2. Mobile columns for reinforcing threatened points on the coast and for suppressing insurrections in the interior.
3. The garrisoning of peace-time stations by territorial troops.
4. The defence of colonial centres was to be assured by the territorials living there.

These measures of protection would enable the 37th and 38th divisions, each of 16 battalions, to be withdrawn from Africa for assignment to the north-eastern theatre.

It appeared advisable to retain the whole of the expeditionary corps in Morocco, until they could be relieved by native troops.

The arrangement of the Lines of Communication had to take account of possible modifications by the Commander-in-Chief in the distribution of his forces, as circumstances might direct. The railway, as I have already had occasion to say, is one of the principal instruments of strategy. Now, the organization under Plan XVI was wanting in elasticity. In Plan XVII, therefore, all the transport lines were to be maintained for the purposes of concentration, but with only a certain number of Regulating Stations. Provision was made, in addition, for a system enabling lateral movements to be carried out.

Apart from points of detail, Plan XVII made no change in the actual mobilization, which remained as in Plan XVI, namely:

For army corps (other than the covering troops) troops were to be ready to move as follows:

- Cavalry, on the third day at 18 hours,
- Other fighting troops, from the fourth to the ninth days,
- Train, the tenth day.

For the covering troops:

- The first echelons, on the first day between the 3rd and 8th hours,
- The remainder of the first echelons by the 27th hour,
- The second echelons, on the second, third and fourth days.

Cavalry divisions were to be ready for entraining at 18 hours on the third day.

For the reserve divisions, the two Paris divisions were to be ready to move between the fifth and tenth days, all the others between the ninth and twelfth days. The territorial divisions were to be ready between the fifth and fifteenth days.

Fortresses on the north-eastern frontier were to complete their mobilization on the seventh day; those on the south-east between the sixth and tenth days.

In the plan, as submitted to the War Board, the general distribution of our forces was then dealt with.

The north-eastern theatre was the principal one, and was naturally to absorb practically all our active units. Second-line formations were, as already explained, assigned to tasks entailing less cohesion.

In regard to the south-eastern frontier, all that was required was to prevent the adversary, in any event, from debouching rapidly from the mountains, and bringing action to bear prematurely on our operations. This could easily be assured by French forces in inferior numbers supported by works barring access to the carriage roads. As a matter of fact, the Italian mobilization was known to be so slow that, even if carried out, no serious effort on the part of the Italian troops was to be anticipated for at least a month. We seemed to be incurring no risk, under these circumstances, in entrusting the initial defence of this region to reserve divisions. They would certainly have time to acquire cohesion before any serious contact occurred with their ultimate adversaries.

The south-western region and the coast-lines were exposed to little

danger, but provision was made to secure the coast-line against surprise attacks. •

The two reserve divisions, 61st and 62nd, provisionally allotted to Paris, were fully equipped. They were available for operations in any theatre, together with the 67th Reserve Division which, concentrated at Mailly, formed a central reserve under the orders of the Minister of War to provide for the unexpected. The existence of these three divisions enabled the defences of the Alps to be still further reduced, and territorial divisions only to be stationed along the coast.

The general distribution of our forces, as thus outlined, conformed to the decision adopted unanimously by the Supreme Council of National Defence on January 9, 1912. This decision was expressed in the following resolution:

"The whole of our active corps should be moved as rapidly as possible towards the north-eastern frontier. Reserve units and the territorial army can be entrusted with the defence of our secondary frontiers and of our coasts."

The actual distribution was as follows:

*North-eastern theatre of operations*

21 Army corps.

2 African divisions, the 37th and 38th.

1 Alpine division, the 44th.

10 Cavalry divisions.

14 Reserve divisions.

The mobile garrisons of the north-eastern fortresses.

The whole of the army heavy artillery, and mobile heavy artillery.

*South-eastern theatre of operations*

4 Reserve divisions.

1 Territorial division.

The mobile garrisons of the south-eastern fortresses to be formed eventually into the 44th Division.

*South-western front and coasts*

6 Territorial divisions.

*General Reserve*

3 Reserve divisions (61st and 62nd in Paris, 67th at Mailly).

1 Territorial division.

Concentration was to be ensured by means of 10 independent lines of transport, comprising:

A group of 3 lines terminating between Belfort and Toul.

A group of 3 lines terminating between Toul and Verdun.

A group of 4 lines terminating between Verdun and Hirson.

These ten lines were connected up by lateral ones, by which modifications, either foreseen or unexpected, could be carried out during the concentration. This applied more particularly to the divisions from Africa and the 44th Division which could be moved, as circumstances directed, by the main lateral Dôle-Dijon-Paris-Creil-Tergnier.

In addition to this, by means of the Regulating Stations, concentration could be arranged either right forward or back in the zone between the general line Laon-Soissons-Rheims-Troyes-Dijon-Besançon and the front comprised between the Moselle above Toul and the Meuse below Pagny.

Henceforward, transport instructions would only indicate a group of detraining points and the normal zone in which each army corps was to be quartered. The advantages of this were twofold. In the first place, the preparation of these instructions would be greatly simplified, thus enabling the new plan to be put into force in a considerably shorter time than the former plans, with their complicated instructions. In the second place, army commanders would have time to carry out any necessary modifications in their respective zones.

Under the new system, also, the rear troops of the larger units could be directed on to the most advanced detraining points. In this manner, successive detrainments would enable the armies to advance at an earlier date.

These various measures were calculated to render the concentration more elastic which, in view of the uncertainty of the situation, would be a great advantage.

The maximum capacity of 56 train-loads daily per line could be reached on the fifth day and, under these conditions, troops would be ready for action in the zone of operations as follows:

The cavalry, on the evening of the fourth day;

The fighting troops of the army corps between the ninth and the evening of the tenth days;

Reserve divisions, half at midday on the eleventh day and half on the evening of the thirteenth day;

The divisions from Algeria and Tunis would be disembarked at Marseilles on the seventh or ninth day, and could be between Toul and Epinal on the morning of the sixteenth day, or north of Toul on the seventeenth day;

The Alpine division would be moved under similar conditions.

So far as regards the *covering troops*, the document submitted to the War Board emphasized the weakness of their numbers as compared with



the German covering troops, and the great extent of the sectors allotted to our three army corps on the frontier. It was this situation which led to the new recruiting law being submitted to Parliament, to the draft law authorizing the creation of a XXI Corps at Epinal, and to the proposed Decree modifying the zones of the II, VI, VII and XX Corps in such a manner as to include the II Corps in the initial covering operations.

Preparatory studies had clearly shown the importance of securing the line of the Meurthe. The XX Corps was able to ensure this, provided that its sector was limited to the Moselle on the left and the forest of Parroy on the right. The remaining part of the XX Corps sector, from Saint-Dié to Baccarat, was exposed to a sudden attack by a German corps recently created at Sarrebourg. The creation of the XXI Corps with garrisons between the Meurthe and the Moselle, therefore, appeared to be indispensable. This corps was to be formed of troops drawn from the VII, XX and XIV Corps and the 19th Artillery Brigade. Its covering sector was to extend from the Upper Vosges, in the neighbourhood of Fraize, up to Mononvillers, thus including lines of approach from Schlestadt, Strasbourg and Sarrebourg.

In view of the interrelation between operations in the Upper Vosges and the Belfort region, the VII Corps was assigned a sector extending from the Schlucht pass to the Swiss frontier. In this sector, the 14th Division was to be echeloned between Belfort and Lons-le-Saulnier, with one brigade of the 13th Division holding the Vosges from the Schlucht inclusive to the Ballon d'Alsace. The other brigade of this division was to be in the neighbourhood of Giromagny ready to support either the 14th Division or the brigade in the Vosges. In addition to this, the 8th Cavalry Division was to detrain near Montbéliard and to reinforce the covering troops beyond Belfort.

It was essential, at the first intimation of the violation of Belgian territory by the Germans, to have a force near Givet large enough to hold the Meuse from that town up to Namur. The II Corps was, therefore, called upon to station the 4th Division at Mézières and a cavalry regiment at Givet.

The defence of the southern part of the Woëvre, between the line Verdun-Conflans and the Saizerais plateau, was entrusted to the VI Corps. The corps commander, with two of his divisions, the corps artillery and the 6th Cavalry Brigade, was to cover Toul and Verdun, and hold himself in readiness to support either the XX Corps on his right, or the II on his left. The remaining division of the corps, the 12th, was to

form a general reserve in the region Saint-Mihiel-Commercy, at the disposal of the general commanding the covering troops.

Between the fifth and sixth days, the covering troops would be reinforced:

In the Northern Woëvre, by the 3rd Division,

In the Southern Woëvre, by the 9th Division,

In the Upper Meurthe, by the 15th Division.

As from the fourth day, the corps cavalry regiments of the II, V and IX Corps would be in position as reinforcements to the covering troops, while the 1st, 3rd and 5th Cavalry Divisions would be assembled in the Mézières region at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief.

At the outset, the whole of the covering troops would be under the direct orders of the Commander-in-Chief, sectors being commanded by the corps commanders concerned. As from the fifth day, the command of the covering troops would devolve on the army commanders.

The *fortified systems* were intended to support the covering troops and help them to protect the concentration. They were, in addition, to aid the initial operations of the armies by ensuring their passage towards the frontiers.

Now, in their actual state, our fortresses were incapable of fulfilling this latter task; none of them was capable of playing a part such as the Metz-Thionville system. The situation had, therefore, to be improved by works to be executed at the outbreak of hostilities.

With this object in view, studies had been carried out for organizing strong defensive positions on the Hauts-de-Meuse, the Grand Couronné and the far side of the forest of Charmes.

*Hauts-de-Meuse.* The undisputed possession of the front Damvillers-Hauttemont-Vigneulles-Apremont was necessary to ensure the protection of troops detraining and also to facilitate an offensive north of the line Verdun-Thionville. The organization of this front had already been drawn up in detailed form, and the position was to be held from the outset by the covering troops. These troops would be replaced, towards the eleventh day, by reserve divisions.

*The Nancy bridge-head.* Starting from the inception of the covering operations, a position was to be organized east of Nancy, with the object of protecting the left flank of columns moving north-east, from any threat from the direction of Metz. It was to be ready by the time the first concentration moves began. It was to comprise the Faulx plateau, the Mont d'Amance and the Cercueil heights. The organization had been

entrusted to the XX Corps whose commander, in agreement with the army staff, had already drawn up the plan, while the engineers had fixed the profile of each work.

*Forest of Charmes.* It was necessary to ensure the passage of the Moselle and a subsequent move on Gerbeviller and Rambervillers. For this, the plateau of Ortoncourt and Essey would have to be occupied, for which studies were being undertaken.

This completed the points submitted for the decision of the War Board. In regard to the *order of battle*, the document proceeded as follows:

The order of battle of the armies, their distribution on the frontier, their general grouping during concentration, form part of the plan of operations drawn up by the Commander-in-Chief on his personal responsibility. The following data are communicated to the War Board for information:

The group of Armies of the North-East will comprise:

5 armies,

2 independent groups of reserve divisions,

3 cavalry divisions

The mobile heavy artillery

{ to remain at the disposal of the  
Commander-in-Chief.

Composition of the armies:

*First Army* VIII, XIII, XIV, XXI Army Corps, 6th Cavalry Division, in the area Charmes-Arches-Darney.

*Second Army* IX, XV, XVI, XVIII, XX Army Corps, 2nd and 7th Cavalry Divisions, 59th, 68th and 70th Reserve Divisions, in the area Pont Saint-Vincent-Mirecourt-Vittel-Neufchâteau-Pagny-la Blanche Côte.

*Third Army* IV, V, VI Army Corps, 9th Cavalry Division, 54th, 55th and 56th Reserve Divisions, in the area Montfaucon-Clermont-en-Argonne-Commercy-Louvemont.

*Fourth Army* XII, XVII Army Corps, Colonial Army Corps, 10th Cavalry Division, in the area Vavincourt-Void-Gondrecourt-Bar-le-Duc.

*Fifth Army* I, II, III, X, XI Army Corps, 4th Cavalry Division, 52nd and 60th Reserve Divisions, in the area Hirson-Rethel, Sainte-Menehould-Mézières.

*Cavalry Corps*—1st, 3rd and 5th Cavalry Divisions in the neighbourhood of Mézières.

*A group of Reserve Divisions*, comprising the 58th, 63rd and 66th Divisions in the Vesoul region.

*A group of Reserve Divisions*, comprising the 51st, 53rd and 54th Divisions in the Vervins region.

*An "Upper Alsace" Detachment*, comprising the VII Army Corps and the 8th Cavalry Division.

Memorandum:

The 37th and 38th Divisions to come from North Africa. A division ultimately to come from the Alps. The 67th Reserve Division at the Mailly camp, at the disposal of the Minister of War.

The 61st and 62nd Divisions assigned, at the outset, to the defence of Paris.

In regard to the secondary theatres, the Note, based on Plan XVII, gave the following details:

*South-eastern Theatre.* It was assumed at this period that, if the Italians entered into the war against us, they could not be ready before the eighteenth day, and could not attack before the twentieth or twenty-fifth day. They might aim either at Nice or Lyons. In the latter case, their object would be to combine their operations with those of the Germans; but they would be obliged to cross the difficult valleys of the Tarentaise, Maurienne and Romanche, which were defended by fortifications.

Under these conditions, we contemplated a strictly defensive attitude for the Army of the Alps for two months. For this purpose it would make use of the fortified areas of Bourg-Saint-Maurice, Modane, Briançon, Tournoux and Nice, as well as the second-line fortresses of Albertville, Chamonsset, Grenoble and the Telegraph. The army was to consist of four reserve divisions (64th, 74th, 65th, 75th), a territorial division allotted to the coast of Provence, some elements specialized in mountain warfare, the fortress garrisons (four action regiments—the 157th, 158th, 159th and 173rd). In the event of Italy declaring for neutrality, these active regiments would form part of the 44th Division.

The south-eastern region was to be divided into five defence sectors:

Tarentaise (Bourg-Saint-Maurice).

Maurienne (Modane)

Briançon (Briançon)

Ubaye (Tournorge)

Alpes Maritimes (Nice)

Covering operations were to be assured by eight Alpine groups (5 in the 14th Region and 3 in the 15th). On the tenth day of mobilization, these battalions of *Chasseurs Alpins* were to be relieved by reserve Alpine battalions, and would be moved to the north-east, where they would join the XIV and XV Army Corps. Behind these covering troops, there would be the 74th, 64th and 65th Divisions in reserve at Chambéry, Gap and Nice, respectively. The 75th Division would be in general reserve at Avignon and the territorial division at Aix-en-Provence.

The headquarters of the Army of the Alps was to be at Lyons.

*The Pyrenees front.* In view of our existing relations with Spain, it was necessary only to take measures for watching the frontier. This was to be carried out, in the first place, by reserve regiments, which would eventually be relieved by two territorial divisions based on Perpignan and Bayonne. In the centre, a cordon of customs and forest guards was considered sufficient.

*Coast Defence.* The defence was entrusted to the French fleet, entirely concentrated in the Mediterranean. The organization was to include mobile and fixed defences.

(a) *Mobile Defences.* The coasts of the North Sea and English Channel were the most exposed to attack, and were divided into three sectors:

- i. the ports of Calais and Boulogne.
- ii. the ports of Dieppe and Havre.
- iii. the Cotentin.\*

A territorial division was to be allotted to each sector with headquarters at Saint-Omer, Rouen and in the Cotentin respectively. A central reserve could also be provided. The ultimate defence of the Brittany coast and a part of the Atlantic seaboard was to be ensured by a territorial division stationed at Le Mans or at Angers. The Bayonne territorial division, in addition to the Spanish frontier, was to take over the remainder of the Atlantic coast.

(b) *Fixed Defences.* The fixed defences consisted of the garrisons of important points—Cherbourg, Brest, Lorient, Bordeaux, Toulon, Bizerta, etc.

The War Board assembled at the War Ministry, on the afternoon of April 18, 1913, the Minister, M. Etienne, presiding. It was unanimously decided that Plan XVII should be drawn up based on the report I have just summarized.

On the following day I departed with M. Etienne on a round of

\* The Cotentin is the name given to the peninsula formed by the north-western portion of Normandy. The principal port is Cherbourg.—Trans.



inspection, in the course of which we paid special attention to Verdun and the defences of Nancy.

On May 2nd, the Minister himself approved the main lines of the plan which, consequently, could now be proceeded with. Moreover, with every day that passed, the necessity for this plan was more clearly shown. As a matter of fact, in April, when all the various papers concerning Variation No. 2 were finally completed and put in order, it was seen that the successive modifications of Plan XVI had brought about a certain number of errors. These errors were of such a nature as to make it doubtful whether the concentration could be carried out with the necessary order and regularity.

I venture here to make a short digression to relate a rather curious matter which was submitted on May 17th to the Supreme Council of National Defence.

In the course of the meeting on January 9, 1912, the Minister of Marine stated that, in his opinion, command of the sea ought to be assured before the transport of troops from North Africa to France was undertaken. He considered therefore that the date for the move to commence must be fixed by Vice-Admiral de Lapeyrière. On the other hand, the Minister of War wished the transport to be carried out by boats belonging to the Mediterranean steamboat companies. These boats, according to him, could proceed separately, the first departures to take place on the fifth day from Algiers, Oran, Philippeville or Bizerta, with arrival 48 hours later at Marseilles. In the course of the discussion, the President of the Republic stated that it would perhaps be advantageous to accept the King of Spain's proposal either to provide us with a naval base in the Balearic Isles, or even to assure the move of the XIX Corps across Spain. This was an interesting proposal and well worth studying, so that it was decided that the Ministries of War and Marine should, in concert, examine the question in all its bearings.

The 4th Bureau of the Army Staff (Southern Railway Committee) formulated the following objections: If our troops were disembarked at Barcelona, we should derive very little advantage. If, on the other hand, they were disembarked between Carthagen and Alicante, their safety while on the high seas could be easily assured, but serious disadvantages were to be anticipated from the use of the Spanish railway line. For the greater part of its length, up to the French frontier, this line ran along the coast and was, consequently, exposed to enemy attacks. Spain was short of railway material and, owing to the difference between the Spanish and French gauges, we should find it difficult to equip the line.



Finally, if for some reason or another, troops had to be detained in Spain while en route and quartered in the vicinity of the line, difficulties of a diplomatic nature were certain to arise.

The proposal was, therefore, abandoned. My only object in referring to it now is to show the good-will evinced by the King of Spain in this connection.

To return to my narrative. The 3-year law was voted on August 7, 1913. This enabled us to undertake the re-organization of the army, which was the foundation of the new plan. The whole of the summer of 1913 was spent in drawing up the parts of the plan concerning the covering operations and rail moves. I was greatly occupied during the whole of this time by the discussions in the Chamber on the 3-year law and by my visit to Russia. On my return, the big manœuvres in the south-east took place, at the finish of which I found that the 4th Bureau had made great progress in the work. Instructions for the covering operations were then taken in hand, but these could not be given definite form until the law had been passed at the end of December for the creation of the XXI corps at Epinal.

At this period, General Pau, who had been selected for the ultimate command of the principal army, the Second, reached the age limit for retirement. On my recommendation, General de Castelnau was nominated to succeed him. Then, I chose General Bélin, who had worked for a long time with General de Castelnau, as First Assistant Chief of Staff. I appointed, as his assistant, General Berthelot, who had impressed me by his work on the Technical Committee of the Staff. The post of Second Assistant Chief of Staff was shortly afterwards vacated by General Legrand on his appointment to the command of the newly created XXI Army Corps. He was an excellent officer who had displayed great activity in the preparation of the 3-year law. The vacant post was filled by General Ebener under whose orders were placed the 1st Bureau, the Staff personnel and the accounts sections and the African Sections. General Bélin had under his direct control the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Bureaux, that is all the organs directly concerned with the execution of the plan. It is, therefore, General Bélin who has been responsible for the greater part of this execution, while it was General de Castelnau who carried out more particularly the preparatory studies which enabled the framework of Plan XVII to be established.

The measures definitely adopted in December, 1913, for the preliminary urgent covering operations differed only in points of detail from those originally outlined in the plan. The allotment of an Alpine brigade

to reinforce the Upper Meuse sector was, in particular, abandoned. The move of this brigade could not have been carried out sufficiently rapidly, and it was thought preferable to leave the XIV and XV Corps as they were. But the 3-year law enabled us to allot more and stronger units to the covering troops. A portion of the troops which were to form part of the covering force, but which had been in garrisons in the interior, had already been quartered in the frontier zone. This, in its turn, enabled us to increase the number of sectors and to reduce their length. The situation in regard to the covering operations was now, from right to left, as follows:

*"Trouée de Belfort" and the Upper Vosges Sector.* This sector, to be held by the VII Corps, extended from the Swiss frontier near Delle on the right, to the Schlucht on the left. The 14th Division was to have one brigade up at Belfort, to be reinforced at short notice by the other brigade. The task of this division was to cover the mobilization of the fortress of Belfort. On its right, the 8th Cavalry Division was to watch the approaches between Petite Croix and the Delle road. The 41st Division, covering the Upper Vosges, was to have one brigade in position at an early hour. The other brigade, to be detrained in the 36th hour, was to have its main body towards le Thillot.

*The Upper Meurthe Sector.* The creation of the XXI Corps enabled the whole army corps to be allotted to the region between Fraize and Avricourt. The security of the line of the Meurthe was essential for the further development of our operations, and this appeared to be satisfactorily assured between Fraize and Lunéville. The greater part of this corps was stationed on the Meurthe and the Moselle and could be in position at an early hour. The 6th Cavalry Division was to detrain on the left of the XXI Corps, in the unprotected part of the sector.

*The Lower Meurthe Sector.* This sector, as reduced, extended from the Moselle on the left to the Parroy forest on the right. In view of the reduction, the XX Army Corps, supported by the 2nd Cavalry Division, was well able to hold the most important part of the line of the Meurthe in front of Nancy.

*The Southern Woëvre Sector.* The limits of this sector were, on the right, the right bank of the Moselle, the line Dieulouard-Port-sur-Seille, and on the left, the line Ornes-Amel-Avril (north of Briey). The greater part of two divisions of the VI Corps were stationed on the Meuse. These two divisions, therefore, with the 1st Cavalry Brigade, should be able to protect Toul and Verdun against any sudden attack at the outset. These

troops were to be reinforced towards the 40th hour by the 12th Division and the corps artillery and, two hours later, by the 7th Cavalry Division.

*The Northern Woëvre Sector.* This sector was assigned to the II Army Corps of which the 4th Division (3 brigades) had nearly all its troops on or to the east of the Meuse. The task of this division was twofold. In the first place, it had to afford sufficiently distant protection, with 2 brigades and the 4th Cavalry Division, to the detraining points echeloned between Verdun and Sedan. In the second place, it was to have a sufficiently strong force near Givet at an early hour, so that the passages over the Meuse between Givet and Namur could be rapidly occupied, as soon as news was received of the violation of Belgian neutrality by the Germans.

*Cavalry Corps* (1st, 3rd and 5th Divisions). The Cavalry Corps was to detrain at the 40th hour in the Mézières region, where it would remain at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief.

Furthermore, it has been seen that, between the evening of the 4th day and the 6th day, the covering troops would be reinforced by:

the 15th Division in the Upper Meurthe Sector

the 9th Division in the Southern Woëvre Sector

the 3rd Division in the Northern Woëvre Sector

The total, therefore, of the troops to be employed in the covering operations amounted to 127 battalions, 24 corps squadrons, 138 horse batteries, 48 squadrons belonging to cavalry divisions, 21 horse-artillery batteries.

The mission of the covering force was essentially a defensive one.

As I have already said, the command of the covering troops was to be exercised up to the 5th day, under my direct authority, by the army corps commanders in their respective sectors. As from the 3rd day, inclusive, the command of the sectors passed to the respective army commanders.

I have shown that I considered it necessary to supplement our fortified system by the organization of positions which the covering troops would be able to hold for a length of time against superior numbers. To this effect, the instructions for the covering operations were completed by orders for the *defensive organization* of the following localities:

1. *The Nancy bridge-head.* A bridge-head to the east of Nancy, comprising the Faulx plateau and the four strong points of La Rochette, Mont d'Amance, Pulnoy-Cercueil and the Rambelant plateau north of Saint-Nicolas.

Part of the works were already under construction. The position was to be completed and its defence assured by the XX Army Corps, as part of the covering operations, reinforced by 2 batteries of 4.8 inch guns and

2½ batteries of 6.2 inch C.T.R. guns. Reserve divisions were eventually to take over both preparation and defence. In time of peace, approach roads were to be constructed, woods cut down, redoubts and batteries concreted, shelters and ammunition depots built.

2. *The "Hauts-de-Meuse."* The undisputed possession of the Hauts-de-Meuse was necessary, not only to protect the detraining, but also to enable free movement later on to be carried out behind the line of the Meuse. The defence was organized in 3 sectors:

(a) *Eparges-Hattonchâtel-Hendicourt Section.* The organization of three strong points was to be commenced in peace time. Their object was twofold: to form the basis of a strong line of resistance for the VI Corps, and to enable an advance to be made later on in the Woëvre. The works were to be completed by the covering troops, aided, after the 5th day, by reserve divisions. Four batteries of 4.8 inch guns were to be at the disposal of the VI Corps for the defence of this area during the covering operations.

(b) *Haudiomont-les-Blusses Section.* In this section, the Hauts-de-Meuse to the left of the VI Corps were to be held by the Verdun garrison, in liaison with that corps. The Haudiomont position was entirely independent of the Verdun defences, and work was already being carried out on the construction of protected battery positions, railways, improved field of fire, and infantry defences on the lower slopes.

(c) *Ornes-Damvillers Section.* By reason of the nature of the ground, this section was suitable only for defensive operations. The organization of the position was planned, but work was only to be started on mobilization, on the arrival on the 7th day of the leading troops of the IV Army Corps. There were to be two batteries of 4.8 inch guns available for these troops. A certain amount of preparatory work could be done at the outset by the covering troops in the area, a detachment of the 4th Infantry Division.

3. *Montmédy.* The organization of the high ground north and south of Montmédy was to be undertaken in peace time. There were two objects in view:

- i. To facilitate the task of the covering troops at the outbreak of hostilities.
- ii. To enable an army concentrated on the left bank of the Meuse to debouch either to the east or the north-east. The object of an easterly advance would be to operate against the right flank of forces advancing on Verdun. A north-easterly advance would be di-

rected against the left flank of an army which had violated the neutrality of Belgium.

A portion of the works was to be carried out in peace time. They would be continued, during the covering operations, by troops of the II Corps and, later on, by reserve divisions.

In regard to covering operations on the south-eastern frontier, these were naturally affected by the uncertainty as to the attitude Italy would adopt in the event of a Franco-German war. Everything pointed to Italy remaining neutral, but the possibility had to be considered of her deciding on a determined offensive at the last moment. Sufficient protection had, therefore, to be assured, while at the same time care had to be taken to avoid any large movement of troops, which might be considered provocative. In consequence, it was decided for the initial covering operations, not to employ any units forming part of the XIV and XV Corps, but only the troops belonging to the fortress garrisons. These troops were normally stationed in the mountains in the summer and could be moved without arousing any susceptibilities, or in any way delaying the departure of the XIV and XV Corps.

As the XXI Corps had been brought into being at the end of December, 1913, the plan for the covering operations came into force as from that date.

On the other hand, nothing had yet been done for putting the new plan of concentration into action. The 4th Bureau had merely settled the new lines of transport, which gave the following results. The concentration on the north-eastern front of the active corps and reserve divisions would be carried out along ten independent lines. Mobilized formations would be distributed so as to allow approximately the same amount of traffic to each line. I have previously described (p. 92) the grouping of these lines and how they could be linked up by several lateral ones, of which the most important ran through Dôle, Dijon, Paris, Creil, Tergnier. Troops could be moved up to points on this link either by the Paris-Lyons line, the Bourbonnais line, or even by the line from Toulouse to Paris.

With the object, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Plan, of rendering the detraining more elastic, the 4th Bureau no longer proposed to fix in advance the exact detraining point. This would be decided by the Regulating Committees and the quartering officers within the radius of the Regulating Stations. It would be possible, therefore, to establish the zone of concentration either right forward or drawn back, between the general line Laon-Soissons-Rheims-Troyes-Dijon and a front



running along the Meuse from below Pagny and along the Moselle above Toul. Moreover, in their respective concentration zones, army commanders would be free to change detrainig points, and thus modify the distribution and orientation of their main bodies, in such a manner as to enable them best to adapt their plans to the instructions issued by me.

It only remained for these proposals to be approved and for orders to be given to the various sections of the army staff to prepare all the instructions and documents necessary for putting them into operation.

This comprehensive work was finished by April 15, 1914, thanks to the energy displayed by the staff, under the capable direction of General Bélin. By May 1st, all the documents were in place. However, General Bélin was anxious to assure himself that everything was in order, and asked to be allowed to carry out a general inspection on the ground. He reported to me, at the conclusion of this inspection on June 1st, that everything was ready.

It is fitting that acknowledgment should be made here of the valuable work carried out under high pressure by General Bélin and the officers of the army staff. It was due to them we were able, two months later, to carry out the mobilization and concentration in perfect order and without any check. Among all the officers who rendered such devoted service, special mention may perhaps be made of Major Poindron, head of the Plans Section, and of his chief, Colonel Pont. The latter was promoted in March, 1914, from Assistant Chief to Chief of the Operations Bureau, in which capacity his intelligence, sense of order and modesty endeared him to all.

It still remained, however, to provide army commanders with instructions giving, in condensed form, the general lines of the concentration, so that their own studies and the work of their staffs might follow the proper channels. This was done in February, 1914, when "Instructions for the Concentration" were drawn up by my orders. These instructions opened with the basic idea, namely that it was the intention of the Commander-in-Chief to take the offensive as soon as his forces were assembled. Justification of this doctrine is to be found on the Marne in 1914 and in the operations of 1918. As these instructions have already been published and discussed in numerous documents, it is unnecessary to reproduce them here.

There is one observation, however, which I feel bound to make. It is that, in my view, the movements were not necessarily to be carried out exactly as laid down in these instructions. As I have already said, I considered that arrangements for concentration were only fixed, in definite



fashion, up to the Regulating Stations. Beyond these, decisions would have to be governed by the development of the situation, and the instructions modified accordingly.

In my opinion, the instructions for the concentration were not comprehensive. They did not provide for all contingencies. It was impossible for them to do so, for the final decisions of the Government were, in large part, dependent on the attitude of Belgium, which remained enigmatic up to the very last moment. This was brought out very well by Lord French when he said, "It is most regrettable that Belgium could never be persuaded to decide in advance on her attitude in the event of a general war." It would have simplified in very large measure our task in the days preceding the war. *In a document to be issued to a comparatively large number of persons, I could only, officially, take into account operations outside Belgian territory.* I was obliged to contemplate a violation of Belgian neutrality, but I preferred to put nothing in writing in the plan of operations, and had to be satisfied with a concentration lending itself to various ends. I confined myself to asserting my intention of pursuing an offensive in a general north-easterly direction, as soon as the whole of the French forces were assembled.

This reserve on my part appeared to me at the time to be perfectly well justified, and seems to be still more so today.

To take a case in point. Our mobilization might be delayed by circumstances of a domestic nature, or the Germans might so well conceal their preparations as to complete their mobilization before ours. It is quite evident that, in both of these cases, we should be obliged to concentrate in a rearward zone. It will be seen, moreover, that it was exactly this contingency that I had to fear during the period of political tension.

When the Instructions were being finally drawn up, it was suggested that a paragraph should be added to the effect that they did not claim to provide for every contingency. I refused to do this, for I thought it better to issue directions for studies to be made of modifications having in view the concentration of our main forces in the northern portion of the theatre of operations. I considered that the Instructions, as they stood, met the case sufficiently well and formed a good basis for the work of the staffs of the various armies. I felt sure that these staffs were quite capable of carrying out any modifications I might have to order, and judged it dangerous to disclose in advance the various manœuvres I had in mind.

As a matter of fact, it was found, in August, 1914, that a great part of these Instructions required no alteration.

It is, moreover, to be noted that, for reasons of secrecy, no mention was made in the Instructions of British co-operation, of the rôle the Belgian Army might eventually play, of how the troops from Algeria were ultimately to be employed, and also our Alpine troops, in the event of Italy remaining neutral.

The various modifications which I caused to be studied by the staff of the Army were based on the following ideas:

a. To move the Fifth Army as far north as the presence of British troops would allow; in other words, to the area between the Meuse and the Sambre. In this connection, it must be remembered that hard and fast regulations were laid down for the transport and detraining of the British forces. Instead of, as in our case, arriving fully mobilized and in order of march, both the army corps and the divisions were made up in accordance with the train schedules. It is manifest that no modifications were possible in a transport organization of this nature.

The move of the Fifth Army could be carried out either by alterations in the detraining points, or by march route as soon as concentration was completed.

b. To reinforce our left wing, by troops withdrawn from the right, or by those arriving from Africa or the Alps. I even went to the extent of having the situation studied in regard to possible modifications of the mission assigned to the right wing, in the event of a large number of troops being withdrawn.

c. To transfer army corps from one army to another. Changes of this nature could produce no serious disturbance during the concentration period, as the armies would not be constituted before the war broke out. Moreover, transfers of this nature are frequently carried out during a campaign; they provide one of the means of manœuvre within the framework of an army.

d. To move to the north the territorial divisions which had been originally assigned to the defence of the coasts.

As can be seen, it was my preoccupation in respect of Belgium which was at the base of these modifications. Some of them could be carried out even before the concentration. Others, on the other hand, would have to be executed later. Among these latter were the moves by road which could naturally only be performed after the troops had detrained; certain moves parallel to the front which would have to be made after the main concentration transports, if these were not to be dislocated. There might

be delays, entailing a counter-offensive rather than an offensive. Still, the risk of this was small as, under the main hypothesis, our left wing should be far enough from the Germans to give us time to act as events directed.

In March, 1914, I gave instructions for a "Plan of Information" to be drawn up for the Group of Armies of the North-east, which I approved on March 28th. It laid down all the information I considered it necessary to have to enable me to decide on the manoeuvre to be adopted. It was to serve as the basis of the "Plan of Information to be Furnished by the Special Branch of the Intelligence Service," of the "Plan for Strategic Air Reconnaissance," and of the reconnoitring operations entrusted to the cavalry corps and cavalry divisions with the armies.

This plan is interesting from the fact that it brings out well my anxieties regarding the enemy's moves, and the information which I had to have to enable me to reach a decision.

For the sake of clearness, the plan was divided into sections corresponding with the periods of political tension, covering operations, concentration and main operations. This division was not, however, to be taken too literally, nor as implying that these limits were necessarily to apply to the information to be obtained.

(Note by Translator) In the original manuscript, the main provisions of this Plan were reproduced *in extenso*. They include a mass of detail which, while perhaps of interest to the military student, appear out of place in a work intended for general circulation. The Plan, in detailed form, has, therefore, been placed in Appendix to Part I, and a summary only given here of the information which Marshal Joffre considered as essential.

*Period of Political Tension.* The countries against which Germany was making preparations for war, and the possibility of presumably neutral countries doing so. The possibility and probable direction of any surprise attack on the part of the Germans.

*Period of Covering Operations.* The importance of early information respecting any violation by the Germans of Luxembourg and Belgium. The hostile troops and fortifications which would be encountered by a French offensive in Upper Alsace and the Vosges.

The possibility and probable direction of any surprise attack on our front, especially in the direction of Nancy, Verdun, Hattonchâtel and Saint-Dié. In the event of the enemy penetrating into Luxembourg and Belgium, his progress was to be followed and his right wing located.

Special activity in the Metz region.

*Period of Concentration (7th to 10th days) and Period of Main Operations (from about 12th day).*

Information as to large hostile concentrations. The importance of locating the wings of the adversary, and of having the earliest possible confirmation of his violation of the Swiss frontier.

The direction taken by the enemy's main forces. Location of armies in second line.

Information as to German forces facing Russia and left on the coast.

Possibility of Italy and Austria co-operating with Germany.

Any information as to the measures taken by neutral countries to ensure respect of their neutrality, with special reference to Belgium and Switzerland.

Before closing this chapter, I must mention several other measures which I was called upon to take in the last months before the war, measures which were directly connected with the subject matter of this chapter.

The German mobilization could be carried out, as we know, in several phases and was, therefore elastic. If we were not to find ourselves outstripped it was essential for us to be able, similarly, to carry out a great part of the mobilization arrangements in successive stages.

As far back as 1909, an Instruction had been issued providing for a series of measures to be taken in the event of political tension, and I had this brought up-to-date. The work of revision gave rise to the issue on April 4, 1914, to two memoranda which contained in detailed form the measures to be taken not only by the corps commanders, but also by the Minister himself. It will be seen in a later chapter that a great many of these measures were put into operation during the period of political tension at the end of July. Others, which our adversaries might have advanced as proof of our bad faith, were not applied. All I will say here is that Germany did not show the same scruples.

As I have already explained, our system of fortifications, although wanting in many respects, was calculated to ensure the protection of the concentration and the deployment of the field armies. It will be remembered, however, that I did not consider this system sufficiently comprehensive to protect the initial forward moves of our armies. I have shown how I dealt with this point by providing for the construction of defensive works on the outbreak of hostilities.

It seemed to me essential to have a systematic record of our fortified system. Moreover, the attention of the public was directed at this time towards everything which concerned our military organization, and argu-

ments on the subject were being exchanged both in Parliament and in the press. I decided, in consequence, to review in detail each place, and to select definitely those on which work was to be concentrated and credits allotted. I, therefore, had a thorough study made on this question, with the object of establishing our fortified organizations on a sound general basis. This study was to include not only our northern and north-eastern frontiers, but also the coasts and the secondary frontiers of the Alps and the Pyrenees.

The results of this study, in regard to the north-eastern frontier, were submitted to me on February 21, 1914. Recommendations, to provide for subsequent operations, were made for the following:

1. A fortified region to be organized comprising the three important positions of Toul, Frouard and Saint-Nicolas-Tonnoy south of Nancy.
2. South of this region to extend the defences of the Epinal region up to the Durbion, and to bring the Montbard fort, south of Belfort, up-to-date.
3. North of Nancy, to bring the Girouville-Jouy area up-to-date; to extend the fortified region of Verdun up to Haudiomont by the construction of an outer position on the plateau of the Blusses; at Montmédy, to organize a system of defences which would serve as a pivot to our left wing in the event of its having to change direction with a view to penetrating into Belgium.

At the outbreak of hostilities, positions were to be organized in front of the forest of Charmes and on the Hauts-de-Meuse.

It was proposed that the Jura forts south of Pontarlier, Longwy and the entrenched camp of Lille should be reduced to second class. From its geographical situation, and liable as it was to be turned from all sides, Lille did not seem to be suitable for organization as an entrenched camp, especially as it could contribute no assistance to any manœuvre.

After a thorough study of the requirements of each place, I decided to submit the programme to the War Board, which was assembled for this purpose on July 21, 1914, in the Cabinet of the War Minister. The agenda included the condition of the defences of the important fortified regions, the examination of new siege and fortress artillery, the employment of artillery in the defence, and the use of aircraft in the fortified regions.

But rumours of war were already to be heard, and more important matters had to be considered. It was the very day on which preliminary warning of mobilization was given throughout the whole of Germany.

There remain only a few words to be said respecting the members of



the War Board who, under my orders, were to share the responsibility of the conduct of operations.

At the beginning of 1914, the War Board included Generals Gallieni, Archinard, Michel (Governor of Paris), Chomer, Laffont de Ladébat, de Langle de Cary, Duhal, Sordet, Ruffey, de Curières de Castelnau. The *rapporteurs* were Generals Bélin and Legrand, the two assistant chiefs-of-staff.

I had known General Gallieni for a long time and had served under his orders in Madagascar. I had a very high opinion of his military talents, which had been confirmed during manœuvres and map exercises. He was essentially a man of method, quiet and prudent, with a clear mind, a quick understanding of any task entrusted to him, and careful to an extreme not to interfere with his subordinates. It was certain that the most important commands could safely be entrusted to him. The confidence which both I and his subordinates had in him was a sure proof that he would always show himself worthy of his glorious past. To my mind, there was no one more fitted than he to assume, in case of need, the supreme direction of operations. On my recommendation, a *lettre de service* was sent him, nominating him to replace me if the emergency arose as Commander-in-Chief of the group of armies of the north-east.

General Gallieni had been for three years in command of the troops which, in the event of war, were to become the Fifth Army. On April 24, 1914, he reached the age limit and, on my recommendation, was replaced on the War Board, as eventual commander of the Fifth Army, by General Lanrezac, of whom I shall have occasion to speak when dealing with the history of the first weeks of the war.

For some time past General Lanrezac had attracted my attention by reason of his marked intelligence, activity and initiative, and the skill he had displayed during map and ground exercises. There was no one who seemed to me more suitable for the command of the Fifth Army, whose movements would be the most intricate of all and whose rôle was essentially dependent on circumstances.

Of the other armies, the First was entrusted to General Dubail, a fine dependable soldier, very conscientious and with a high sense of discipline.

General de Castelnau was to command the Second Army. He had already taken part, as I have shown, in all the studies leading to the establishment of Plan XVII, of which he was one of the principal authors. His ability in manœuvring troops was a reason for his appointment to



this army, which would have to attack in Lorraine between the Vosges and Metz.

The Third Army was to be commanded by General Ruffey who had a sound reputation as an artilleryman. He had a brilliant mind and a fertile imagination, and his technical qualifications would stand him in good stead in the operations his army would probably have to carry out in the Metz region.

The last, the Fourth Army, was entrusted to General de Langle de Cary. He was of an upright and firm character, had a high sense of discipline, and was imbued with a strong sense of responsibility. The greatest possible confidence could be reposed in him, so much so that, when he was due to pass to the reserve of officers in June, 1914, I arranged for his *lettre de commandement* to remain in force. That this confidence was not misplaced is proved by the exceptional qualities he displayed in the first months of the war as commander of the Fourth Army and, later on from the end of 1915 to the middle of 1916, as commander of the group of armies of the Centre.

General Valabrègue, commanding the III Corps, became a member of the War Board in the place of General de Langle. He was given a *lettre de commandement* for the group of reserve divisions which, on mobilization, was to assemble in the area Vervins-Hirson, in the rear of our left.

General Sordet, the only cavalry officer on the War Board, was entrusted with the command of the Cavalry Corps, which was to reconnoitre on the left of our armies in the region of Mézières.

To General Archinard was given the command of the group of reserve divisions which was to concentrate at the outset in the Vesoul region, and to operate on the left of our armies.

Finally, General Laffont de Ladébat was appointed Director of the Rear.

PART TWO

1914—THE WAR OF MOVEMENT





## CHAPTER I

### *The Days Preceding the Declaration of War—July 24 to August 2*

DURING the evening of Friday, July 24, 1914, the Minister of War called me to his office. M. Messimy, who three months before had returned to his former post, seemed much upset. He informed me that the German Ambassador, Baron von Schoen, had read that afternoon to M. Bienvenu Martin a note in which the German Government stated its entire approval of the ultimatum which had been addressed by Austria to Servia. This note, indicating clearly the intention of Berlin to support Vienna, seriously disturbed the French Government and, added the Minister, placed it under the necessity of anticipating the possibility of having to go to war.

The long habit of constantly thinking of what must be done in case war broke out caused me to regard this redoubtable eventuality without any surprise, so I very quietly answered: "Well, Monsieur le Ministre, if we have to make war, we will do so." It may be that my attitude brought some comfort to M. Messimy, for he came over to me, pressed my hand with some emotion, crying out "Bravo!" We then set to work in the calmest fashion imaginable to examine the first measures which must be taken if the menace of war became more certain.

Our situation was rendered extremely delicate by the absence of the heads of the Government from France; for the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister (who was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) were both in Russia. This threw a heavy responsibility upon those members of the Cabinet who remained in Paris, and I am obliged to admit that a considerable nervousness was observable in official spheres during several days.

*Saturday, July 25, 1914.* This perhaps explains how it happened that on July 25, at 10 p.m., when the Minister of War learned of the rupture of relations between Servia and Austria, without consulting me, he caused the Chief of his Cabinet (General Guillaumat), to send out telegrams ordering all absent general officers and unit commanders to return to their garrisons.

*Sunday, July 26, 1914.* The next morning, when I learnt of this action, I felt it necessary, in order to recall to the Minister's mind my own responsibility in this connection and the existence of a document which fixed in chronological order the various measures to be taken in time of political tension. This document had been carefully thought out and drawn up in a period of calm; it approached the whole question in its most general aspects, and all improvisation, which would have been necessarily faulty, was thus avoided. When, therefore, just before the Cabinet Meeting which took place at the Foreign Office at 11 a.m. on the 26th, I was received by the Minister of War, I formally insisted upon the necessity of a strict execution of the various measures set down in Annexes 2 and 2A of the "Instructions Governing the Preparations for Mobilization."<sup>1</sup> M. Messimy was good enough to understand at once the sentiment which induced me to claim my share of the responsibility, and with entire good grace he agreed to follow in their order the prescriptions set down in the document whose existence had just been recalled to him. I may add that from this moment on the Minister did nothing without consulting me.

During the night of July 25th/26th and the morning of the 26th, disquieting news continued to come in; we learned, in particular, that German officers on leave in Switzerland had been recalled by telegraph and that guards had been placed at the bridges throughout the German Empire. I, therefore, asked the Minister to put in force all of our preliminary measures of precaution, which were the following:

- (1) Cancel all projected movements of troops.
- (2) Cancel all leave to officers and men.
- (3) Recall all officers on leave.
- (4) Recall all non-commissioned officers and men on furlough.

M. Messimy left me to go to the Cabinet meeting, where he proposed the adoption of these measures. He came back at 12.30 and immediately informed me that the Cabinet had agreed to the three first measures, but in regard to the fourth, it seemed best to wait until we knew definitely whether it was true, as had been telegraphed us from Switzerland, that the Germans had adopted similar measures. At this time a large number of our men were on leave for the harvest season, and if they were suddenly recalled to their regiments it would cause great excitement throughout the country.

The General Staff immediately sent out orders for the execution of the first three measures. General d'Amade, the commander-designate

<sup>1</sup> These Instructions were drawn up February 15, 1909, and revised April 4, 1914.

of the Army of the Alps, was engaged with his staff, on a tour of inspection in the Alpine region, and I had them recalled to Paris. The railway companies and the government railway officials were given warning during the evening as to the dispositions they were to make. The Minister of the Interior was also asked to take certain measures of security and to direct the Prefects to impress upon the newspapers confidentially the need of silence and discretion in all that touched our military preparations.

*Monday, July 27th.* The next day, July 27th, we received a despatch from our Military Attaché in Vienna, dated the day before. According to his information, seven Austrian army corps stationed near Servia and Roumania appeared to be completely mobilized, while those of Vienna and Gratz were partially so. A total of twenty-three infantry divisions were ready to start to war without a mobilization order being necessary. Moreover, Austro-Hungarian military circles were boasting of the support which Germany was sure to give. It looked as though we were sliding down a slope which would infallibly lead us to hostilities.

In respect to France, it seemed sufficient to continue putting into effect the various measures already provided for, but it was most important to do this without delay.

Now, amongst these measures, there was one—the recall of men on leave—which had not obtained the Government's approval the day before. It was only at 6 o'clock on the evening of the 27th that I could obtain the Minister's authority to apply this measure to the army corps on the frontier and in the military region of Paris; towards midnight this order was extended to the other army corps and to the Tunis Division. For we had just learned that the German garrisons in Alsace-Lorraine had been confined to their barracks and (a most significant detail) the uniforms intended for war had been distributed to these troops.

Among the measures to be put into effect there was one especially which demanded the decision of the Government. The question was, whether all the troops of eastern and western Morocco should remain at the disposal of the Resident General, or whether those near the border of Algeria would be assigned to the XIX Army Corps with a view to their transfer to the Continent. M. Messimy submitted this question to the Cabinet, which decided that the largest possible number of combatant units compatible with the security of our North-African possessions should be withdrawn from Morocco and Algeria.

The direction which events were taking left me with no illusion—we



were headed straight for war, and Russia was going to find herself drawn in at the same time as ourselves. My first thought, therefore, was to strengthen the liaison between us and our Allies, and I asked the Minister to endeavour through all possible means to make sure that if hostilities broke out the Government of St. Petersburg would immediately take the offensive in East Prussia, as had been agreed upon in our conventions.

It will be recalled how important I considered this immediate offensive to be; we had requested our Allies to promise to undertake it, and they had agreed to do so. Our Military Attaché and, as I have been given to understand, our Ambassador were asked to inquire of the Russian General Staff whether we could count upon them in this matter, while at the same time indicating the great importance that we attached to their offensive taking place in conjunction with ours. This question was answered by the announcement made the moment war was declared, that the Russian attack would open at once.

*Tuesday, July 28th.* The main preoccupation of the French Government was to make no move which could be construed as anything except a reply to some step taken by Germany. This timid attitude was largely the result of the absence of the heads of the Government; nevertheless, under the pressure of circumstances, the necessary measures were taken little by little. For example, on the night July 27th/28th, orders were given for all troops absent from army corps stationed in the interior to return to their garrisons.

On the morning of the 28th we learned that the order for mobilization had been issued in Austria and that the first day of mobilization would be July 28th. This information, transmitted by our Military Attaché in Vienna, was confirmed by a telegram from St. Petersburg to the Russian Military Attaché in Paris. Moreover, information from various sources proved that the war armament of Metz and Thionville was being put in place, at least in respect of the left bank of the Moselle. This consisted chiefly in putting up barbed wire, installing of the advanced batteries and distributing ammunition and supplies.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> We already knew that the mobilization plan of the Germans specified that in case of political tension the exportation of all foodstuffs, etc., was subordinated to the authority of commanders of corps or of maritime ports; more especially the movement of grain, munitions, petrol, etc., could be arrested. Now, on July 26th, we learned with certainty that the transportation of grain intended for Switzerland had been stopped by order of the Government. Similar measures had been taken during the political tension of 1911, when the movement of cereals up the Rhine towards Switzerland had been stopped. In this way we had proof that the German Government had put into effect the measures which, in case of political tension, would restrict the free movement of goods, just as those applying

Information was received from various quarters that men on leave had been ordered to re-join and a number of reservists called up in Alsace-Lorraine. But the most important information was contained in a despatch from M. Cambon, dated July 21st, and communicated only after an incomprehensible delay to the Minister of War. "I have been assured," said the Ambassador, "that already the preliminary warning of mobilization, which places Germany in a sort of 'position of attention' during periods of crisis, has been sent out to the classes which under these circumstances are expecting the warning. In view of German habits, this measure can be taken without exciting the population or causing indiscretions to be committed. There is nothing sensational about the step and it is not necessarily followed by a regular mobilization; nevertheless, it is significant."

The full importance of this information can be readily comprehended, for it proved to me that for seven days at least the Germans had been putting into effect the plan devised for periods of political tension and that our normal methods of investigation had not revealed this fact to us. Our adversaries could thus reach a condition of mobilization that was almost complete, since their army corps were always maintained at a strength nearly approaching that of a war footing. I, therefore, had reason to fear that, without declaring war and under cover of diplomatic discussions, the Germans, taking advantage of the advance they had seized, might attempt a surprise attack against our advanced positions. It will be recalled that it was this fear, to a great extent, which had caused France a few months before to reinforce her covering troops.

Up to this moment we had only taken what might be called passive measures of protection; it now became necessary to put our covering forces into position, and I urged upon the Minister that the safety of the country required that this step be taken without delay. M. Messimy considered that we still had not sufficiently plain indications to justify such a measure; he thought it would be interpreted both in France and abroad as a bellicose manifestation which might embitter diplomatic conversations. Above all, this measure seemed to him of such gravity that he decided to delay its decision until the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister had returned to France.

*Wednesday, July 29th.* M. Poincaré and M. Viviani were expected to arrive in Paris the morning of the 29th, but they only reached the station at 1.30 p.m. A Cabinet meeting was held at the Elysée at 5.30 o'clock, and

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to railways had caused rolling stock to be held back; at the same time men on leave had been recalled and troops confined to their garrisons.

it was only at 7 p.m. that the question of the covering forces was taken up. Upon M. Messimy's suggestion, the Government decided to wait a few hours longer. But the illusions which a few still nourished that things would yet turn out all right, could not be any longer maintained. Indeed, during the night, M. Isvolsky informed M. Viviani that M. Sazonoff had received notification at 3 p.m. of the Germans' intention to mobilize their armed forces if Russia did not cease her military preparations. A despatch from our Ambassador at St. Petersburg shortly afterwards confirmed this news, while adding that the Russian Government had decided to order the mobilization of the thirteen army corps destined to operate against Austria.

Thus, in spite of the fact that diplomatic negotiations were still going on, it was evident to everyone, except those who refused to admit it, that the situation had suddenly taken a very serious turn. Upon the receipt of this news, the Prime Minister and the Ministers of War and Marine went to the Elysée to study together "what measures France would take if Germany in her turn should mobilize."

To me this temporizing seemed extremely dangerous, for war now appeared inevitable. During this day of the 29th we had learned that the concentration moves would commence in Austria on July 30th and that the forward movement of the Austro-Hungarian Army would in all likelihood take place during the course of the following week. Moreover, the VIII and IX Army Corps, stationed in Bohemia, were in full course of mobilization.

In Germany measures followed rapidly one upon another. Covering dispositions were assumed along the frontier of Alsace-Lorraine, stations and railway bridges had been guarded militarily since the evening of the 28th, large requisitions of flour had been made in Metz and Strasbourg, and orders succeeded orders calling reservists individually to the colours. However, nothing had transpired to make us suppose that an entire class had yet been summoned, but information from excellent sources led us to fear that on the Russian front a sort of secret mobilization was taking place.

To anyone who understood the methodical spirit which characterized the Germans, it seemed evident that all these measures, constituting a part of the plan intended to be applied in case of political tension, was fatally leading the German Empire towards that war which William II had predicted to King Albert in November, 1913. Convinced as I was that hostilities were imminent, it can be imagined with what anxiety I followed the preparations of our eventual adversaries and those being

made by our Allies, and with what avidity I seized upon every fact which indicated the development of events and the grouping of forces.

My thoughts turned more and more anxiously towards Belgium. What attitude was she going to adopt? King Albert has given so many proofs of his loyalty to the Allied cause that today no one need hesitate to point out that his family relations and the tendency of his mental processes gave rise to some fear that he might turn towards our enemies. Moreover, the powerful Catholic party of Belgium was Germanophile, and the influences of this party might have a considerable bearing upon the decision of the Government. It was to the eternal honour of the King that he saw how perfectly he reflected the aspirations of his people in placing himself on our side. However, it is none the less true that at this moment, July 29, 1914, we were still in complete ignorance as to Belgian intentions. All that we knew was that soldiers on leave had been recalled, that the forts on the Scheldt were being armed and that Antwerp was being rapidly put into a state of defence. Neither at Namur nor at Liège was any special activity announced.

A letter from our Military Attaché in London informed us that on the 26th Great Britain had as yet undertaken no warlike measures; the troops were still in camps and the Home Fleet was at Portland, where the naval manœuvres had just terminated.

There was nothing to indicate that any special dispositions had been taken by the Italian Fleet; on the other hand, all soldiers absent from their garrisons had been ordered to return, and rumours were abroad that the last two classes of reservists were about to be recalled.

In spite of all the precautions taken not to alarm French opinion, the anticipation that war would break out began to spread through the country. As one indication, I might mention the visit made to the Minister of War on the 29th by M. Devières, one of the important officials of the Creusot Company, who, in M. Schneider's name, made the following statement: "Our firm has artillery material ready to be immediately forwarded to various powers—Servia, Italy, Roumania, Greece, Peru; we would like to know whether we should delay or accelerate the delivery of this material, and whether the French Government would prefer to requisition the whole or any part of it. We also desire to know whether the War Department would like us to place any or all of our establishments at its disposal. M. Schneider will be in Paris this evening, and tomorrow he will place himself at the orders of General Joffre."

*Thursday, July 30th.* While I was in the Minister's office, M. Schneider was announced. In the course of the conversation I remember saying to

the President of the Creusot works: "As a matter of fact, guns will be very useful, but what we need above all is ammunition. All metal works must be got to work immediately." It did not seem to me at the time that my appeal in this matter aroused any very great interest, and I refer to this important question in Appendix to Part I.

The night of July 29th/30th, brought information clearly confirming my anticipations touching preparations for war by the Germans. It was now certain that their covering forces had been strengthened. News came in from Fontoy, Moyeuvre, Saint-Privat, Verneville, Gorse, Noveant, Delme, Château-Salins, Dieuze, south of Sarrebourg and in the valleys of the Bruche and of the Oderen, which proved that these positions had been occupied and strengthened by field works; patrols had been pushed up as far as the frontier, and all along the line work intended to complete mobilization had been commenced: cutting down trees, construction of batteries, putting up barbed wire. Farther towards the German rear, troops had been brought up during the 29th to reinforce the garrisons of Cologne, Treves, Sarrebourg and Strasbourg; the railway stations were occupied, the force of telegraphists increased, the roads leading to France barricaded, travellers carefully interrogated, and only motor-cars with permits were allowed to circulate.

In short, all the measures of protection were being executed exactly in their anticipated order as laid down in a report which had previously come to my knowledge. As far as I was concerned, therefore, there existed in my mind no doubt as to the fatal outcome of these preparations: and this absolute certainty that the Germans were taking each step of their programme in the methodical way which characterized them, gave me the conviction that war was inevitable and proved to me the necessity of ourselves getting ready for it without a moment's delay.

Faced by this menacing situation, we had taken practically not a single measure for our defence, and I had not even received from the Government permission to establish our covering forces in place. When I saw M. Messimy on the morning of the 30th, I once more urged the absolute necessity of the Government's taking this decision. He shortly afterwards went to a Cabinet meeting and there informed his colleagues of my insistence. The séance was very long, but finally, after several hours of deliberation, the Minister of War sent to inform me that the Cabinet agreed that the covering troops should be put in place, but with the following reservations:

The only units to be moved up would be those which could reach their stations by march route, no movement by railway being authorized. No



reservists were to be called up for the moment, and no requisitions made. Horses immediately needed to complete those on hand with the troops were to be bought in the open market. Lastly, no covering troops were to approach closer than 10 kilometres (6 miles) from the frontier, in order that contact between French and German patrols might be avoided.

When the Minister communicated this decision to me, I strongly protested against the refusal to call up reservists and against the restriction imposed by limiting all movements to march route; I also represented to him that these half-way measures would in no fashion protect us from a sudden irruption across our frontier. In regard to the 10-kilometre limit, I made little objection, recognizing the strength of the motive dictating it and realizing, moreover, that this measure would in no way compromise our mobilization or our later operations.

But my protest remained without effect. The decision had been taken at a Cabinet meeting and M. Messimy could not alter it on his own authority. All that I could obtain was that the troops destined for entraining should be moved up close to railway stations. I also pointed out that the necessity of our keeping back 10 kilometres from the frontier was too rigid, and I obtained authority for myself to indicate the line which was not to be crossed.

About 5 o'clock in the afternoon the Minister signed the order for putting in place the covering troops of the II, VI, VII, XX, and XXI Army Corps, he having in the meantime learned from the Prefect of Nancy that the frontier had been violated at Xures.

After being several times modified, the order, as finally sent out, was as follows:

"Execute preparatory measures for Operation No. 24 in garrison mobilization plan for extreme frontier, as laid down in Annex No. 2, to Instructions dated February 15, 1909.

"This measure will apply likewise to all the garrisons of your corps.

"Until further orders and unless suddenly attacked, no reservists must be called up.

"Covering troops whose movement to their stations has to be made by railway will hold themselves ready to entrain; those whose movement is made by march route will immediately proceed to occupy the positions prescribed for them for meeting surprise attack. However, for diplomatic reasons it is indispensable that no incident shall arise that can be laid to our door. Therefore, no troops and no patrol must under any pretext approach or cross the line hereinafter laid down."

Information received during the afternoon of the 30th merely confirmed what we already knew concerning the placing of German cover-



ing troops. We also learned of the departure from Kiel of the German fleet in an easterly direction.

From Austria came the news that the mobilization of eight army corps had been going on actively since July 28th and that the first concentration transports would commence the 30th. In Belgium, men on leave had been recalled and measures taken to put Antwerp in a state of defence, but no activity was signalled at Namur or Liège; however, the last three classes appeared to be recalled to the colours. We were informed that in Italy public sentiment seemed opposed to any military intervention on the side of Austria and that recent events, on the contrary, tended to produce a marked movement in our favour. Four classes of reservists had been recalled to the colours for August 1st.

A comparison of the measures taken in France up to July 30th with those which we knew had been accomplished in Germany (certainly the minimum) went to show that while both in France and Germany men on leave and units absent from their garrisons had been recalled and all bridges guarded, nevertheless, the Germans had realized a serious advance over us by reason of their having already taken the following steps: covering dispositions reinforced for the VIII, XVI, XXI and XV Army Corps; the posting near the frontier of all covering troops, which were now busy throwing up field fortifications and erecting batteries; the completion of the armament of fortified places along the frontier, clearing of woods, construction of advanced and intermediate batteries, putting up barbed wire, distribution of ammunition; the calling up of reservists individually and notification of convocation to all men living abroad who belonged to the classes from 1903 to 1911; the calling-up of reserve officers; military occupation of railway stations; roads into France barricaded and guarded.

The probability of war now appeared to me so great that I decided to constitute without further delay the nucleus of my future general headquarters, and more especially to assemble the officers who would constitute my operations staff. This would enable them to follow events from the very start. Therefore, on July 30th these officers were assembled, and the next day they began to function in the "Salle des Maréchaux" at the Ministry of War. General Berthelot was Assistant Chief of Staff charged with operations, he had under his orders Colonel Pont and a number of other officers, amongst whom were Maurin, Brécard, Fétizon, Bel, Alexandre and Buat.

*Friday, July 31st.* The morning of the 31st was devoted to a long Cabinet meeting lasting from 9 a.m. to midday. Nothing was discussed except

the financial measures to be taken in view of the serious events which seemed approaching. Nevertheless, it was evident that diplomatic negotiations were turning out badly, and I was anxious to see at least our covering forces fully established in place, while waiting for the complete mobilization which inevitably must soon follow. I knew that M. Viviani continued to hesitate; on the other hand, M. Poincaré appeared fully resolved to take the necessary decisions.

About 2 o'clock I learned the news of the ultimatum addressed on the afternoon of the 29th by Germany to Russia. These events led me to feel that it was my duty to place the Government squarely in face of its responsibilities. I, therefore, drew up a note which recited the last information received; I handed it to the Minister of War at 3.30 p.m., just as he was leaving for a Cabinet meeting, and I urged him to present it to his colleagues. It was couched as follows:

The measures we have taken up to the present fall far behind those effected by the Germans. This is especially the case in respect of the last forty-eight hours.

They have not only put in place their covering elements along the whole frontier, but the main bodies of the VIII, XVI, XXI, XV & XIV Army Corps have been assembled near the frontier, while movements by rail of troops coming from the XI and XVIII Corps regions seem to indicate a strengthening of these covering forces.

Reservists have been called up and horses have been bought and requisitioned more or less everywhere.

In the present condition of affairs it is no longer possible for us to execute further measures of detail, other than those already ordered, without running the risk of gravely disturbing arrangements prescribed for covering troops and for mobilization; this especially applies to the railway service. If the present tension continues and if the Germans, under cover of diplomatic conversations, continue to take the various steps comprised in their plan of mobilization—though without pronouncing that word—it is absolutely necessary for the Government to understand that, starting with this evening, any delay of twenty-four hours in calling up our reservists and issuing orders prescribing covering operations, will have as a result the withdrawal of our concentration points by from ten to twelve miles for each day of delay; in other words, the initial abandonment of just that much of our territory.

*The Commander-in-Chief must decline to accept this responsibility.*

In handing this note to M. Messimy I made the strongest representations to him. I showed him how any delay in the movement of the first covering troops would necessarily have a serious effect upon our concentration transports; I recalled to him that all our information seemed to show that a constant stream of German troops was flowing from the

interior towards the frontier; that German employees at French frontier railway stations had been recalled; that motor-cars passing from France into Germany were held up and seized; that telephonic communication across the frontier was suppressed; that the railways had been cut at Pagny, Avricourt and Montreux-Vieux and French locomotives seized.

The Minister recognized that orders for placing our covering forces in position could not be any longer delayed and that the Government could no longer refuse to recognize the facts. I immediately assembled the chiefs of bureau and gave them my instructions. More especially, the railway service was to be immediately warned to have trains in readiness at the various entraining points.

The Cabinet assembled at 5 p.m. and my note was read. This time M. Viviani gave his approval. It was now 5.15 p.m. However, the Cabinet decided to satisfy my demands only in part, for while I was at last authorized to send the telegram which would put our covering troops into position, I was not allowed to call up the reservists. It was only at 5.40 p.m. that the telegram went out saying: "Despatch covering troops. The initial hour is fixed at 9 p.m." I must confess that I drew a great sigh of relief that this had been done. For it was high time.

A little while after this telegram was sent, the German Ambassador, Baron von Schoen, went to the Quai d'Orsay and announced to M. Viviani that the Kaiser had decided that day to take the step known in Germany by the term "Declaration of Danger of War." He also stated that Russia had ordered a general mobilization, and he was instructed to inquire what would be the attitude of France in the case of a conflict between Germany and Russia.

On learning this serious news, I immediately urged the Minister of War to give orders for our general mobilization without an instant's delay, for I considered it imperative. M. Messimy promised me to insist upon this step when the Cabinet assembled in the evening.

At 9 p.m. the third Cabinet meeting of the day was held. While it was in session, news came of the assassination of Jaurès. This horrible crime caused considerable anxiety lest troubles should break out, and I received orders from the Government to countermand the despatch of the brigade of Cuirassiers from Paris. The 1st Cavalry Division, to which this brigade belonged, would, therefore, be obliged to entrain with two brigades only. The next morning, thanks to the calmness of the Paris population, it became evident that order would not be disturbed; for the approach of danger had united all parties and classes in France. It was, therefore, decided that the brigade of Cuirassiers should entrain on

August 2nd to join its division. As for the question which so much pre-occupied me, that of ordering a general mobilization, it was now too late for the first day to be fixed sooner than August 2nd at midnight. The Cabinet, therefore, decided to wait a few hours more, though at the same time giving me the assurance that if no improvement took place in the situation, the order would be sent out before 4 o'clock, the last limit possible which would permit it to reach the most distant villages and ensure its execution the following morning. But I obtained permission from the Minister to send all army corps a preparatory warning, stating that "most likely, orders for mobilization will be issued today, August 1st, during the evening. Proceed at once to make all preparations which would facilitate mobilization." This telegram was sent August 1st, at 1 a.m.

*Saturday, August 1st.* The situation was now so grave that it seemed no longer possible to hope for any peaceful outcome. It was, therefore, indispensable to mobilize the army, that is to say, call up its reservists. I felt it was necessary to point this out to the Government and to indicate the responsibility which it would incur if there was any delay in taking this step. In consequence, I drew up a second note which, at 9 a.m. on August 1st, I handed the Minister. In it I said:

I mentioned yesterday the serious inconveniences which would result from the delay in sending forward our covering troops; they will be still further increased if the order for general mobilization is retarded. The German preparations are proceeding apace, in strict conformity with the plan carefully established by the German General Staff; the outlines of this plan I am acquainted with, through a report drawn up by the German Staff which fell into our hands.

In this report the following statement is particularly to be remarked: "Without waiting for mobilization orders, a discreet assembly of complementary personnel and matériel can be accomplished by calling up reservists and requisitioning or buying horses; in this way the transport of army corps from the interior can begin immediately the order for mobilization is received. These quiet measures taken in preparation for mobilization, such as publishing the law governing requisitions before mobilization is decreed, arranging that the men are all ready before being actually called up, combined with the rapid execution of our strategic transports, would assure us advantages very difficult for other armies to realize in the same degree. The whole object towards which every effort must be concentrated is to enable us to take the offensive under conditions of distinct superiority, obtained from the very start. The arrangements made to this end make it possible to hope that our offensive can begin as soon as the concentration of the Army of the Lower Rhine has been completed. An ultimatum, allowing only a brief delay for reply, would be

immediately followed by invasion: in this way our action from the point of view of international law would be sufficiently covered."

Information received up to the present shows that five classes of German reservists have been recalled for August 2nd at the latest: requisitions and purchases of horses began on July 30th, possibly before. It can, therefore, be said that on August 4th, even without the order for mobilization having been issued, the German Army will be entirely mobilized; in this way a start of over forty-eight hours, perhaps of three days, will have been secured.

In handing M. Messimy this note I once more urged the imperative necessity of ordering our mobilization. For in France this measure cannot be effected little by little and with the concealments which are possible in Germany; it has to be accomplished once for all. As I took my leave I reminded the Minister that the last possible delay for publishing the order would expire at 4 p.m. He assured me that he would vigorously support my contention, and he left for the Cabinet Council.

This meeting lasted till noon. While it was going on, news came that the Italian Government had decided to maintain neutrality in case of a conflict, thus faithfully executing the secret convention signed by Signor Prinetti and M. Delcassé in 1902. This important news reached me about 10 a.m., and I immediately sent additional instructions to the XIV and XV Army Corps, prescribing that in case of mobilization the covering troops designated for the south-eastern frontier should remain in their mobilization centres, ready to entrain for the north-east.

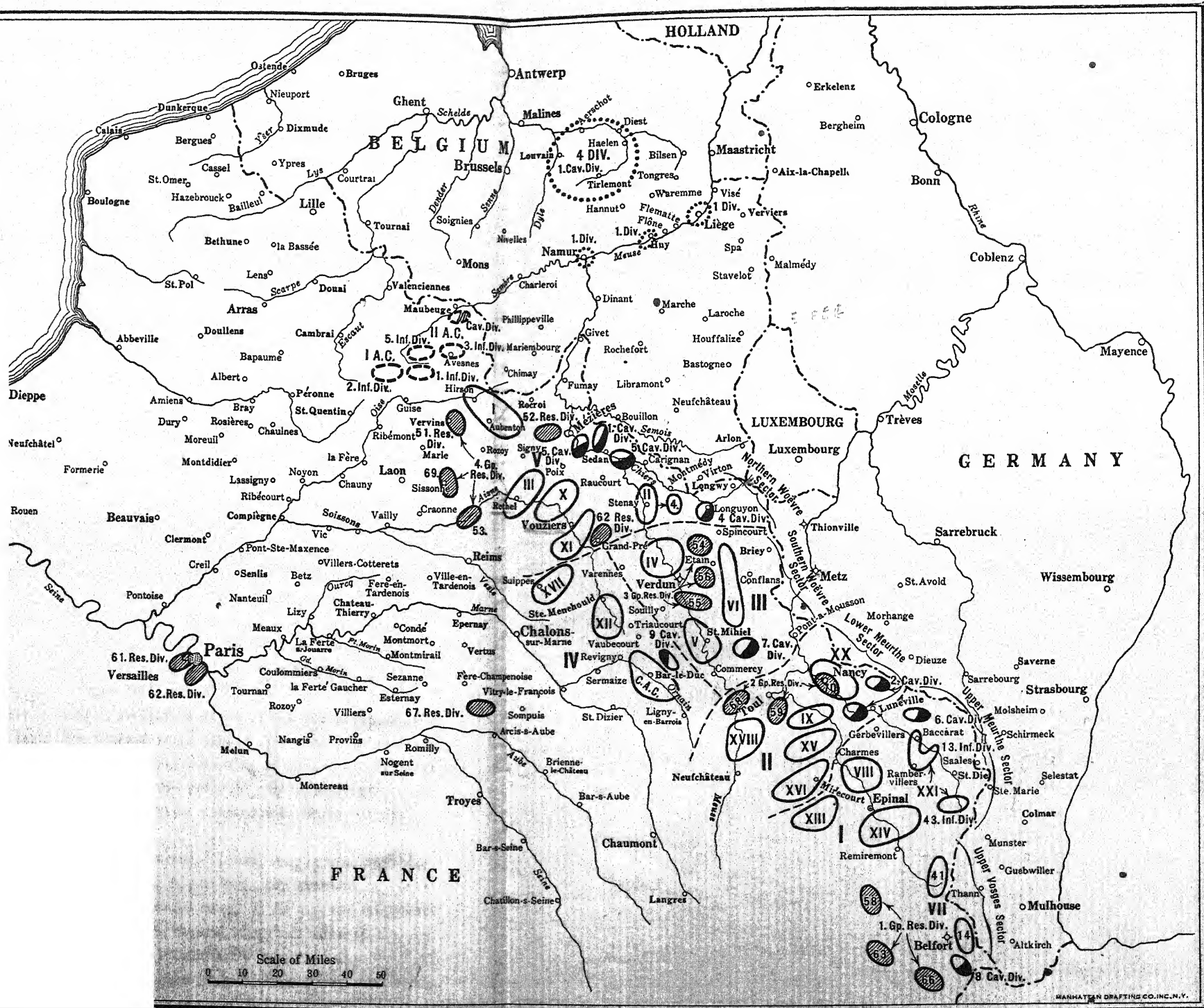
While this Cabinet meeting was in progress M. Viviani was obliged to excuse himself in order to receive the German Ambassador; he had requested an interview the preceding day and had now arrived before the hour fixed. When the Prime Minister returned to his seat he informed his colleagues that in spite of the vague assurances given by Baron von Schoen, he was now fully convinced that I was right, and in face of the dangerous preparations already made by the Germans, he was ready to sign the order for general mobilization. However, in order to hold open until the very last minute the possibility of an arrangement, he asked the Minister of War to keep this order in his personal possession up to the last minute which would make it possible to begin the mobilization on August 2nd at midnight.

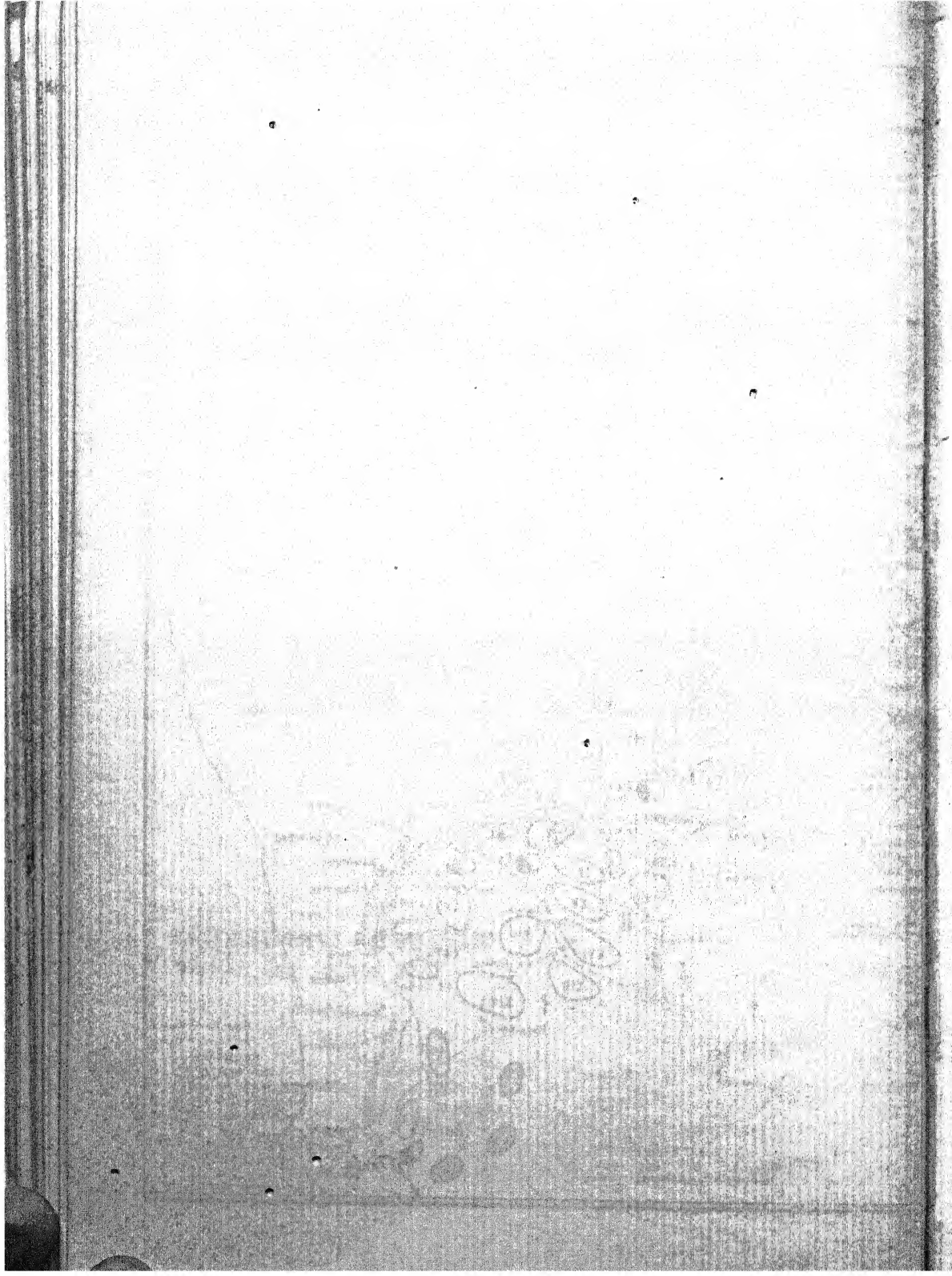
This order was signed by MM. Poincaré, Viviani, Augagneur and Messimy, and confided to the last named; at 3.30 p.m., the moment of execution having arrived, I sent General Ebener to get it. At 3.35 the telegrams already prepared were delivered at the central telegraph office in the rue de Grenelle. All of France was thus immediately informed that the first day of mobilization would begin August 2nd. A little while afterwards











I communicated the order to the 4th Bureau, in order that all the railway commissions might be informed at once.

The Minister of War, doubtless animated by conscientious scruples, now asked me to renew to the troops the formal order prohibiting troops from crossing the line which I had fixed on July 30th; then again, about 10 p.m., at the express demand of the President of the Republic<sup>3</sup> the same prohibition was renewed under a still more imperative form. It was even specified that whosoever should violate this injunction would be brought before a General Court-martial. This action was intended to prevent any possible pretext being given to the British for refusing us their collaboration.

During the Cabinet meeting held on the morning of August 1st, a question of the highest importance had been brought up, namely, what attitude was to be maintained with regard to Belgium, under the hypothesis of war being declared. Assurances that we would respect Belgian neutrality had been given during the afternoon of July 31st by our Minister at Brussels to M. Davignon, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs. When M. Messimy informed me of this step I told him that I considered the statement too absolute and that a reservation should be made covering the case in which Belgium's neutrality should not be respected by the Germans. The Cabinet recognized the justice of this observation, and on August 1st orders were given our Minister at Brussels, M. Klobukowski, to inform the Belgian Government that while the French Government intended to respect Belgian neutrality, France, in order to assure her own defence, might be obliged to modify this attitude in case the neutrality of Belgium should be violated by some other Power.

The question of respecting the neutrality of Luxembourg also arose during August 1st. M. Eyschen, the Luxembourg Secretary of State, requested that the French Government give the same assurance to his country as that already given to Belgium. The French Government immediately answered that it had every intention of respecting the neutrality of the Grand Duchy; however, the violation of that neutrality by Germany now made it necessary for France to be guided solely by considerations affecting her own interests and safety.

It will thus be seen that on the evening of August 1st, at the moment general mobilization was about to begin, I was prohibited, in directing the concentration of our Army, from taking any step which might lead to the supposition of an intention on our part to violate Belgian and

<sup>3</sup> It appears that the President had learned that a squadron of Uhlans and a squadron of French Chasseurs had met face to face in the XX Corps sector.

Luxembourg territory. However, if the Germans should violate these territories, I could make plans to use these new fields of battle, supposing that the French Government then authorized it. Thus, there reigned the most complete uncertainty as to what it would be possible to do. Nothing remained for the moment but to allow the first transports to start, and these, it will be remembered, corresponded precisely to the hypothesis of the non-violation of Belgian and Luxembourg territory. Moreover, since the first concentration transports would not begin until August 6th, there still remained four full days during which it could be decided whether or not to alter the concentration and move our left flank farther towards the north.

I was reflecting upon this matter when I learned of Italy's declaration to the German Ambassador that she would not participate in the war by reason of the aggressive character given their action by Germany and Austria; then towards 11 p.m. I learned of Germany's Declaration of War against Russia.

It was at this moment that I received a letter from General Lanrezac in which he set forth his ideas as to the execution of the mission confided to him in case of hostilities. In the midst of the important events which filled my day, this letter seemed to me entirely inopportune, for it was premature to discuss with one of the army commanders a strategic situation which was still so little defined. After admitting as most probable the eventuality of the German right being directed towards Sedan, General Lanrezac proceeded to suppose the case in which the right flank of the enemy would be directed on Givet or north of that place. "In this eventuality," he said, "it is clear that once the Fifth Army is engaged in the direction of Neufchâteau it could not parry such a move; but this is merely remarked in passing."

It should be pointed out that in this memorandum, written by General Lanrezac on July 31st, no account is taken of either British or Belgian forces. Moreover, it is evident that although I had thought it best not to communicate in writing to the commanders of armies the various forms which our strategic manœuvre might take, these, nevertheless, had been the object of profound study on my part. In regard more especially to the hypothesis envisaged by General Lanrezac, it will be recalled that my solution consisted in opposing the enemy columns in the region east of Hirson and Maubeuge, while, by a march to the north across Belgian Luxembourg, we would upset his dispositions by threatening the communications of his right wing. But it was still too early to take any decision, for the grouping of the various political alliances

had not yet become defined. While we hoped for British assistance, we were not yet sure of it, and only the certainty of non-co-operation on the part of the British Army would oblige us to extend our left towards the north. General Lanrezac's letter was evidently intended to draw my attention to a question whose importance presumably had escaped me. I, therefore, did not answer it.



## CHAPTER II

*The Mobilization—The Concentration—Belgium and Great Britain enter the war on our side—The first combats in Alsace, August 2/16, 1914.*

**S**UNDAY August 2nd. During the night of August 1-2, telephonic and telegraphic communication with Germany was cut, with the result that it was only with much difficulty that we learned what was passing on the other side of the frontier. It was thus not until the morning of the 2nd that we knew for certain that the order for mobilization had been sent out from Berlin the evening before, and it was only some time afterwards that this news was confirmed. Information concerning the movement of our covering troops showed that this was taking place as contemplated, and it now became my duty to decide upon the mission of the troops once they were detrained. The prohibited band of 10 kilometres behind our frontier complicated the situation, for we had to abandon positions which we undoubtedly would be obliged to recover later on at the price of costly fighting. The situation now appeared to me sufficiently clear to make it possible for us to move into this prohibited territory. I explained my point of view to the Minister of War, but by reason of the renewed assurance which the French Government had given Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as through the uncertainty still prevailing in the diplomatic situation, M. Messimy considered that it was more than ever necessary to avoid any clash on the frontier. All he thought it possible to do was to reduce the zone to a width of two kilometres, and he promised to submit this modification to the Cabinet.

During the early part of the afternoon, however, news arrived in Paris that the French frontier had been violated in several places, notably at Longwy and near Cirey; then it was learned that 35 motor-cars loaded with German officers and soldiers had penetrated into Luxembourg. These events were undoubtedly sufficient to convince the French Government, for about 2 o'clock the Minister of War telephoned to General Bélin informing him that "the Government gives the Commander-in-Chief full liberty of action for the execution of his plans, even if these should lead to crossing the German frontier." During the evening of



August 2nd I, therefore, addressed to all the commanders of sectors my general instructions for the covering operations. These stated my intention of taking the offensive only when all our forces were united; I also prescribed, in spite of the latitude just given me, that, in order to leave the Germans entire responsibility for hostilities, "our covering troops should confine themselves to driving any attacking forces back across the frontier, refraining from pursuing them farther or entering upon the adversary's territory."

On the morning of August 2nd news of the violation of Belgium reached Paris. If confirmed it would have a very important bearing, for it would tend to indicate a prolongation of the enemy's action to the north of the region of Verdun. As the afternoon wore on, we received such precise information concerning the German forces north of the line Thionville-Verdun that the violation of the Grand Duchy no longer presented the smallest doubt.

Thus, through the enemy's action and in conformity with the terms of the French Government's declaration to M. Eyschen, a new theatre of operations was opened up to us. Indeed, the presence of elements of the German VIII Corps announced in the region of Malmédy constituted an indication that Belgium might also become a field of battle. From this moment on my thoughts were occupied with the possibility of that manœuvre across Belgium which had always seemed to me the most advantageous one for us and concerning which I had consulted the French Government as far back as the month of February, 1912. This, joined with the opportunity offered of immediately operating through Luxembourg, evidently required a modification of our plan of concentration, and involved a displacement of the centre of gravity of our left wing towards the north. Now, it was not possible to displace the left of the Fifth Army, because the Le Cateau zone had to be reserved for the British, as agreed upon in the arrangements made with them before the war; and since our concentration transports would not begin before August 6th, the only solution seemed to be to apply the Variation prepared for Plan XVII. This consisted in moving the main body of the Fifth Army towards its left, so as to make room for the entrance into line of the army held in reserve, the Fourth, between the Third and Fifth armies—the object being to pass the whole of the Fourth Army north of Verdun.

On the evening of August 2nd I gave orders to execute this Variation of Plan XVII. Without doubt this decision would result in the early engagement of the principal mass of my reserves; but there still remained

at my disposal the 44th Alpine Division and the two divisions from Algeria; moreover, the two groups of reserve divisions placed on the wings represented to my mind available troops; finally, there remained the 67th Reserve Division, held in the region of Châlons under the orders of the Minister of War; in order to increase my réserves I asked him to place this unit at my disposition as soon as it was ready, and this he did.

This same day, August 2nd, General Gallieni, who had been hurriedly recalled to Paris, came to see me. Two days before the President of the Republic had designated him to take my place, should I for any reason become incapacitated. I informed him of this arrangement, which had been made at my request, and told him of my satisfaction in seeing him receive this mark of the Government's confidence. This was the first news he had received of his appointment.

Shortly after General Gallieni's visit, the Minister of War discussed with me the post which, in the meantime, should be assigned to him, the question being whether he should go with me to my headquarters or remain in Paris. I told M. Messimy that I did not think the first solution a good one. I had been Gallieni's subordinate in Madagascar; in his turn he had become mine, and his presence at my headquarters without any well-defined attributions might make it difficult for us both. Although I felt obliged to say to the Minister that I did not desire General Gallieni's presence at my side, there was not the smallest doubt in my mind but that his firmness of character and the respect he would inspire on the part of army commanders would make of him a most excellent Commander-in-Chief whenever he might be called to fill that post.

*Monday, August 3rd.* The attitude of Great Britain was a source of much apprehension. It appeared that she had definitely promised the support of her fleet; but how far would she go in this direction? Would our northern coasts, disarmed as they were, be protected against landing operations? The answers to these important questions appeared still vague; I sent one of my officers to the Ministry of Marine on the morning of the 3rd to get information on the subject. He was told that the British fleet had received orders to protect our coasts on the North Sea and the Channel; in the Mediterranean, the British Fleet, in conjunction with ours, would be sent in pursuit of the German cruisers which had just bombarded the Algerian coast.

When I received this important news I no longer felt any doubts as to the British giving us on land as well as on sea the support we so greatly desired; for it seemed to me quite impossible that in a conflict of this

magnitude a country like England would make war in any half-hearted fashion. The matter was of the highest importance for us. I learned at the same moment of the ultimatum sent the evening before by Germany to Belgium, as well as the reply made by the Belgians to this insolent threat. It seemed difficult to imagine that Great Britain would not feel herself obliged to intervene in a struggle which had thus involved Belgium.

During the afternoon of August 3rd I assembled the commanders of the various armies. All were present with the exception of Generals Ruffey and de Castelnau. It would have been premature to announce my intention of operating through Belgium, for too many unknown qualities still entered the problem; I, therefore, confined myself to sketching the broad lines of the manœuvre I would probably execute, that is to say, a combination of two attacks, one in Lorraine and the other north of the line Verdun-Toul. I also pointed out that the principal task of the armies on our right, and especially the one which would operate in Lorraine, would be to assist our left wing by keeping occupied the greatest possible number of enemy army corps. I also informed them that in all probability the Army of Lorraine—the Second—would be required to place two corps at my disposal for the purpose of reinforcing our left.

*Tuesday, August 4th.* The greatest uncertainty still prevailed in the international situation, that is to say, in the grouping of European forces which would determine what form our manœuvre could take. Regarding Russia, we knew for the moment little or nothing. During the morning of the 4th we learned officially of Italy's neutrality, a fact most precious as affecting the transport of our troops from Algeria and Morocco. During the course of this day the intervention on our side of Great Britain became so probable that at 4 p.m. the Minister of War gave instructions to the garrison commanders at Boulogne, Rouen and Havre concerning the eventual disembarkation of the British in these ports.

In Belgium things were moving rapidly. The news that the Germans had violated the frontier began to circulate on the evening of the 3rd in official circles in Brussels. It was stated, however, that the material fact of the frontier being crossed was still questionable, that the partisans of an arrangement with the Germans were still numerous and powerful in Belgium and that, moreover, it was possible that Germany might be spreading false news in order to induce us to be the first to violate Belgian neutrality. The greatest circumspection was, therefore, still necessary. Another rumour persisted throughout the day, namely, that the

Belgians were showing themselves just as hostile to our entrance upon their territory as they were to that of the Germans.

If the situation was still not entirely clear on our left, such was no longer the case on our right. It will be remembered that my instructions for our concentration provided for a portion of the First Army to advance into Upper Alsace in the general direction of Colmar and that the order for executing this movement might be given as early as the fourth day of mobilization. While our manœuvre in the direction of the north was still undetermined in its form, it was, nevertheless, already prepared, and this operation in Upper Alsace would assist it, since the latter's object, supposing that it succeeded, was to anchor the line of our front to the Rhine, thus making it possible to economize the forces on our extreme right the moment they were protected by the river. The evening of the 5th, that is to say, the fourth day of mobilization, General Dubail, commanding the First Army, was to join his headquarters at Epinal. I, therefore, on the evening of the 4th, in order that he might receive it upon taking command, signed an order directing him to prepare an operation in Upper Alsace, to be executed by the VII Corps and the 8th Cavalry Division. The operation was at first to be limited to the front Thann-Mulhouse.

*Wednesday, August 5th.* This was the date fixed for opening General Headquarters and the headquarters of the various armies, and on that day I was to take actual command of the Group of Armies of the North-east.

On my arrival at the War Ministry I went over the information which had been received during the night. It now seemed certain that the Belgian frontier had been violated on the 4th and that the Germans had reached Verviers. No violation of the frontier had been reported from the direction of Arlon, but Luxembourg appeared to be completely occupied by the enemy. The mobilization of the Belgian Army had been ordered the evening before, the King taking command of the forces in the field. The Belgian Government had prescribed a number of measures for opposing the march of the Germans across their country.

Having received this information, I went to take leave of the Minister of War. He informed me that the French aeroplanes and airships had been authorized to fly over Belgian territory and that the Minister of Foreign Affairs had just told him that cavalry reconnaissances also, if not supported by forces of great importance, would be permitted to operate in Belgium. I immediately took advantage of this information to direct our Cavalry Corps and the II Corps to move as near as possible to the

Luxembourg frontier and reconnoitre the roads leading westwards from the front Virton-Stavelot. The proximity of German troops in this region made it urgent to have information concerning their movements.

M. Messimy insisted upon accompanying me as far as Lagny. When we arrived near this place, he got out of the motor-car, shook hands with the officers who accompanied me, declared that he was full of hope, and wished me good-luck; but he did not try to conceal his emotion. I thanked him, asked him to let nothing shake his confidence and then, with General Berthelot, I got into my motor-car. At 11 o'clock we reached Vitry-le-François, which I had selected for General Headquarters. Here I found the officers of my staff who had arrived by train the evening before.

In view of the numerous legends which have been given currency concerning my headquarters, it may be well to say a few words here on that subject.

G.H.Q. at that time consisted of some 50 officers, counting those belonging to the Services (railways, subsistence, medical department, mail section, code section, motor-cars and headquarters commandant). The offices were established in a high-school in the Place Royer-Collard, facing the church of Notre Dame. My office was in the study-room on the first floor; I and my aides-de-camp had lodgings nearby, in the house of a former officer of engineers, M. Capron. He placed at my disposal his drawing-room, where a camp-bed was set up behind a screen for my use. I took my meals at M. Capron's table with Generals Bélin and Berthelot, Major Gamelin, attached to me from the Operations Bureau, and my two aides-de-camp, Captains de Galbert and Muller.

The routine at G.H.Q., as established from the very start, continued unchanged throughout the war. There were two Reports each day: the first, called the Grand Report, was held in my office at 7 a.m.; the second took place towards 8 p.m. At the Grand Report there were normally present the Chief of Staff, the assistant chiefs of staff, the Director of the Rear, the chiefs of bureaux and the officers of my cabinet. At both the morning and evening meetings I was informed as to the contents of reports sent in from the various armies, relating the events of the preceding twelve hours together with all information gathered during that time concerning the enemy. Naturally, if important reports or despatches arrived during the course of the day or night they were immediately presented to me; but the principal interest attaching to the two daily reports consisted in what might be called "taking our bearings." At the morning report the general situation was established. I frequently re-



quested the officers present to express their personal opinions on the questions before us; after listening to what they had to say, I gave my decisions.

During these discussions the personality of General Berthelot became more and more accentuated. He possessed great reasoning power and intelligence of the highest order; but what stood forth pre-eminently was his comprehension of manœuvre and of organization. However, as he himself admitted, it was hard for him to see difficulties. "I am such an optimist," he used to say to me, "that it is not easy for me to anticipate them." He also agreed that he had a tendency not to make the best use of his assistants, because of a desire to do things too well—that is to say, do them all himself.

General Bélin was absorbed in directing and co-ordinating the numerous and complex services which fell to his charge. The chief of the Operations Bureau, Colonel Pont, was my conscientious and devoted auxiliary; he admirably filled the rôle which fell to him, which consisted in translating into lucid orders the decisions I had made.

Behind these principal subordinates there were the bureaux, and it would be ingratitude on my part if I did not here render grateful homage to the officers who served in them. They accomplished delicate and ungrateful tasks with energy and unruffled calm. They were called upon to record the constantly changing situation both of our own troops and of the enemy's, organize the execution of movements that had been decided upon, transmit orders on time, and insure the arrival of supplies of every nature. They were, in all the acceptation of the term, good staff officers, that is to say, the props of command. They merit their country's gratitude.

*Thursday, August 6th.* On arriving at Vitry-le-François, my first care was to clear up the situation in Belgium. I, therefore, sent to Brussels one of my officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard, commissioned to obtain from the Belgian Government authority for our troops to enter the country without being hampered by the restrictions now imposed upon them. He was also directed to inform the Belgian High Command that it was impossible for us to draw up our plan of operations until we had sufficient information regarding the enemy to enable us to penetrate his intentions. For this reason it was most important for us to have at the earliest possible moment a precise estimate of the German forces reported to be in Belgium. Colonel Brécard was to stop in Paris and inform the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the Ministers of War and Foreign Affairs, regarding the object of his mission.



He had hardly left Vitry when the Belgian Military Attaché, Major Collon, came to see me. He informed me that his Government had called the French Government to its aid and that entire liberty had been given us to penetrate into Belgian territory. Shortly afterwards a telegram from our Minister of Foreign Affairs confirmed these statements, and it can be imagined with what satisfaction this news, following as it did upon the uncertainty of the preceding days, was received. The fog was lifting; a principal manœuvre conducted through Belgium—the solution I had always considered as the one most desirable—could now be definitely contemplated.

I hastened to profit by the authority thus given us; but as the first news coming from Belgium needed to be confirmed, I sent orders that evening to General Sordet, who was near Sedan, to march to Neufchâteau and push his reconnaissances in an easterly and north-easterly direction up to the high-road Laroche-Bastogne-Arlon, in order to verify the form and extent of the enemy's dispositions and delay his columns.

The diplomatic horizon also now became cleared little by little. During the afternoon I learned that Great Britain had that day declared war against Germany and that the first day of British mobilization would be August 6th.

The reports relating to the execution of our mobilization and the movements of our units continued to be entirely favourable. During the last twelve hours the troops intended to strengthen the covering forces had all been detained without incident. The Minister of War telephoned me by the intermediary of General Ebener that the whole country had been favourably impressed by the perfect orderliness which had characterized all the operations of mobilization; the entire press, including even M. Clemenceau, had given voice to admiration. On the side of the enemy nothing was yet defined, but it did not look as though he was contemplating a surprise attack on some point of our frontier; in any case we now had sufficient covering troops in position to give us time in which to make our dispositions if such an event took place.

It seemed unlikely that the VII Corps and the 8th Cavalry Division would meet with serious opposition in Alsace. Therefore, I fixed the morning of the 7th for the date on which our offensive in Upper Alsace should begin. The First Army seemed to think this order premature, for on the 6th General Dubail asked me to delay the operation, since Bonneau, commanding the VII Corps, had expressed doubts regarding his right flank and his rear. At the same time he pointed out that the arrival

of the Austrian XIV Corps in Alsace seemed imminent, it having left Innsbruck on August 4th.

These arguments did not impress me. In the first place, all our aerial reconnaissances indicated that the whole region of Mulhouse-Altkirch-Dannemarie was entirely empty, whereas on the right bank of the Rhine all railway trains seemed to be moving northward. The reports concerning the Austrian XIV Corps had come from Switzerland, where the Germans maintained numerous secret agents. I gave General Dubail orders not to modify the instructions I had sent him.

This same day of the 6th brought me comforting confirmation regarding Russian intentions. Up to that time all that we knew was that Russia expected to put into line the fourteen army corps belonging to the circumscriptions of Wilna, Warsaw and Moscow; but on the morning of the 6th I received a telegram from M. Paléologue, our Ambassador at St. Petersburg, in which he informed me that he had seen the Grand Duke Nicholas on the 5th and had urged upon him the wisdom of an early Russian offensive. To this the Grand Duke had replied by announcing his intention of making a vigorous attack without even waiting for all of his army corps to be concentrated. He had fixed upon August 14th as the probable date for the beginning of his offensive.<sup>1</sup>

Now, a close calculation showed that August 14th was exactly the date on which the strategic deployment of the Germans along their base of departure would be terminated; if, therefore, as was probable (barring accidents during the transport period), our own concentration was finished on this date, we would have no reason to fear that the enemy had been quicker than ourselves, while, in addition, the synchronism of our attacks with those of the Russians would be assured. All these were eminently favourable conditions for the opening of the campaign.

However, the British concentration, constituting as it did one of the important elements of our extreme left, must have an essential bearing upon all my calculations, and it now appeared evident that their fighting units would not be ready to go into action before August 21st. As I desired to attack with all my forces united, and, so far as regarded my left, with the aid of the British, I was thus led to consider the idea of pronouncing our action in two successive steps: about the 14th, by start-

<sup>1</sup> The next morning I received a telegram from the Grand Duke in which he expressed his firm conviction that we would be victorious, and declared his purpose of taking the offensive. He asked me to tell the commanders of our armies that he proposed to place beside his standard of Russian Commander-in-Chief, the French flag which I had presented to him two years before, when he came to France to attend our grand manœuvres. He intended in this way to symbolize the close union which existed between our operations.

ing an offensive with the armies of the right and centre; towards the 20th, by making a forward movement with the left wing. All things considered, this might favour the operation assigned to our left armies, which in my thought was the most important; for the actions undertaken by our right and centre would draw in their direction a considerable part of the enemy forces, thus lightening the task of our armies on the left and also contributing to deceive the enemy with regard to our true intentions.

News coming from Belgium seemed reassuring. The German forces, which the day before had attempted to take Liège by surprise, appeared to have been repulsed with heavy losses, and to have fallen back some six miles towards the east. The German VII Corps having been several times reported in the region of Metz as well as of Liège, the question arose as to whether the elements recognised in Belgium were not merely the fifth brigades of this corps organized with a view to some special mission. This idea was strengthened by persistent reports from excellent sources that heavy concentrations were taking place in Lorraine.

*Friday, August 7th.* Definite information was not long in reaching me concerning the situation in Belgium, for Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard returned on the morning of the 7th with a full report of all he had been able to learn. He had seen in succession M. Klobukowski, our Minister in Brussels, Major Génie, our Military Attaché, M. de Brocqueville, Minister of War, General de Celiers, Chief of the General Staff, while King Albert had received him at his headquarters at Louvain.

He had obtained precise information regarding the situation around Liège. On August 5th, Léman's Division had victoriously repulsed the attacks made on the place by elements of the German VII Corps; on the 6th, these had been reinforced by portions of the X Corps and, renewing the attack, had succeeded in penetrating into the intervals between the forts and in entering the town. Considerable uncertainty prevailed concerning the strength of the Germans; reports were contradictory and the sources of information were often open to suspicion. The main body of the Belgian Army was being concentrated between the Meuse and Brussels, covered by a division at Namur and Huy and by Léman's division at Liège.

Colonel Brécard also brought me most interesting information regarding the general situation in Belgium. The war had come upon the army while it was in full process of reorganization; officers were lacking; General de Celiers, the new Chief of the General Staff, had, up to a short time ago, been in command of the Gendarmerie: Belgian public

opinion manifested intense indignation at the German attitude and showed sympathy for us. The Belgian Government, in response to national sentiment, was doing all they could to preserve the country's independence; but the military problem, arising as it had done so suddenly, caused them much uneasiness, and there seemed little doubt that the Belgian Army was already turning its eyes towards the fortress of Antwerp, to which place it would fall back if Liège were taken. This information gathered on the spot led me to deduce that the Belgian Government would hesitate to combine with us in an offensive operation and would limit its action to a purely defensive attitude. I also felt it impossible to hope that the Belgian cavalry division would join its operations to those of our Cavalry Corps, as I would have so liked to see done.

On August 7th I asked Major Collon, the Belgian liaison officer at my headquarters, to proceed to Louvain and present my point of view as to the rôle which the Belgian Army might play. In my opinion it might move to the Meuse, delay the enemy in his crossing and thus gain precious time for bringing into play Allied co-operation. If this co-operation could be effected early enough, the Belgian Army might seize a favourable occasion to attack in flank the enemy columns which would have to defile before it in their advance against the Franco-British forces. If the disproportion of strength made this attitude impossible, the Belgian Army could fall back upon Namur and there join the left flank of the Franco-British Army.

A short time after Colonel Brécard had made his report to me, a telegram had arrived from M. de Brocqueville, Belgian Minister of War, confirming the information I had just received. This telegram stated that "the Belgian Minister of War requests the French Commander-in-Chief to bring to Belgium the aid of the French Army as rapidly as possible; it is absolutely essential, if only in the interests of morale, that a manifestation of military support be forthcoming." I fully comprehended the importance of this appeal, but with the existing distribution of our forces what assistance could we give to the Belgian Army? The Cavalry Corps alone was in a position to do anything immediately. I, therefore, sent it orders early in the afternoon of August 7th to move northwards, and I indicated as being of the highest importance, from the point of view of both moral effect and diplomatic expediency, that a vigorous action should be undertaken against the adversary as early as August 8th, if a favourable occasion presented itself.

This action, moreover, appeared all the more desirable and probable of success since our Information Service reported that, facing Liège, there

were elements of the VI Army Corps preceded by considerable bodies of cavalry; these had been seen in the region of Marche, moving towards Dinant and Givet. In addition, the infantry of the French II Army Corps was holding the crossings of the Meuse south of Namur in liaison with the Belgian infantry.

Under the conditions then existing there was nothing more that I could do.

I now received news from our Ministry of War that a project was afoot for bringing about an armistice between the Belgian and German armies; the President of the Republic asked me to communicate directly with the commander of the Belgian Army and offer my advice. This I did through the intermediary of our Military Attaché, informing him that I considered he should make a flat refusal to any demand for an armistice presented by the Germans.

My feeling of anxiety and uncertainty regarding the situation in Belgium, in spite of its having become cleared up to a certain extent, was increased by the difficulty of getting reliable news as to events taking place in that country. Here is an example: During this same day of August 7th I received news that half the Liège forts had fallen. The information was serious and it had all the appearance of being authentic. In the evening I learned, this time from Belgian sources, that no fort had surrendered and that the entrenched camp was in an excellent state of defence and promised to hold out a long while. Both these reports agreed in stating that the attacking German troops were very tired, were morally depressed and that the Belgian units were taking them prisoners in bunches of 50!

While my attention was thus being directed towards the north, I received, during the afternoon, the first reports of the results we had obtained in Upper Alsace. Although the troops had met with no resistance they had only reached the front Hennemersdorf-Anspach bridge—Massevaux, that is to say, they had only progressed three miles into Alsatian territory. During the evening I learned that they had reached the front Saint-Amarin-Thann-Altkirch.

*Saturday, August 8th.* The next morning, August 8th, I received additional information regarding the operations of the previous-day, at the same time learning that General Bonneau had "authorized General Berge<sup>2</sup> to maintain his troops in the conquered villages and to withdraw his main body only (sic) during the day."

I was much disturbed at learning of this procedure, and immediately

<sup>2</sup> Commanding the 27th Brigade, 14th Division.



gave orders that the VII Corps was not to fall back under any pretext but must vigorously push forward to Mulhouse and rapidly accomplish the mission which had been assigned it. I likewise urged upon General Dubail how essential energy and speed were in any operation of this nature.

Towards noon I learned that the Minister of War had received direct from General Bonneau a telegram saying, "I report that today the covering operations of the VII Corps have reached the line Cernay-Mulhouse-Altkirch." This direct correspondence between the Minister and the commander of the VII Army Corps seemed to indicate that the latter had forgotten what constituted proper channels of communication; but above all it was evident that General Bonneau in no way comprehended the rôle he was called upon to play. It was not a question of covering operations, but of a distinctly offensive operation, and the extreme slowness and indecision he had shown was tending to compromise the success of a move from which I expected not only important moral effects but which I intended as the basis of a later manoeuvre by the First Army in Lower Alsace. I telegraphed this to General Dubail and asked him to consider whether the commander of the VII Corps had the qualities requisite for carrying out his task. It was quite evident that in all this region nothing seriously threatened the right flank of the Alsatian detachment, whose mission I had enlarged, to the extent of assigning it a serious part in the operations of the armies constituting our right flank.

During the preceding day, August 7th, considerable information had come in concerning the various German army corps identified along the front. This can be understood when it is remembered that the first concentration transports of our adversaries were to begin, according to our calculation, on the 6th day of the German mobilization, that is to say, August 7th. Under this hypothesis, it could be admitted that the concentration would not be terminated before the 13th, the date we had always considered as the probable one. Thanks to these identifications, a first rough idea could be formed regarding the enemy concentration.

It is important to recall here that at this time the object of our investigation was more especially the active corps of the German Army; for we presumed that the reserve units would make their appearance only under the form of second line organizations. We thought that if we succeeded in discovering the location of the larger units of the active army we would have a correct picture of the general disposition of the enemy's forces. It must be admitted that this tendency to consider reserve units as only of very inferior value had a considerable influence upon the de-



velopment of our operations. It originated in the idea generally accepted during recent years, that since the war would be short and violent, nothing but active units would be put in the first line. As a corollary to this, it appeared that reserve units, at the beginning of the war would be assigned to purely secondary missions, such as siege operations, holding defensive fronts and guarding communications; it would be only after a considerable time after the opening of a campaign that reserve units, having acquired cohesion and experience, could be employed under the same conditions as active ones.

As a matter of fact, before the war we had never entirely cleared up the question as to how the Germans would employ their army corps made up of reservists. We were acquainted with their plan of mobilization bearing the date of October 9, 1913; we knew that in this plan it was set down that "reserve troops will be employed in the same way as active troops," but it was added, "this will not be possible unless in time of peace a considerable number of capable officers are assigned to them." Now, we had reason to believe that the German reserve divisions and corps were composed of elements decidedly lacking in homogeneity, that they were weak in artillery (two groups to a division) and that there was a considerable deficit in officers. For all these reasons it did not appear that they fulfilled the conditions considered necessary in the German plan of October 9, 1913.

Moreover, a close study of this document<sup>3</sup> indicated that the rôle attributed to reserve divisions did not appear to be the same as that assigned to reserve army corps. The last named alone appeared to be destined for active operations, "reserve divisions being intended to serve as second line troops which might be called upon, for example, to reinforce an army corps for some special operation." All that we knew of the German organization and its possibilities inclined us to doubt the existence of these army corps; indeed, the Intelligence Bureau of General Headquarters, in a note of August 25, 1914, intended to enlighten our armies in the matter of German reserve formations, stated, on the subject of German reserve army corps, "if these corps exist they are composed of elements in no way homogeneous and they are weak in artillery (two groups to a reserve division); in some cases one of these groups is composed of howitzers; there exists no corps artillery."<sup>4</sup> This explains how it was that on August 8th we had no thought of finding enemy reserve

<sup>3</sup> Analysis of the German Mobilization Plan of October 9, 1913; addressed in May, 1914, to the Chief of the General Staff by the Intelligence Bureau of the Army.

<sup>4</sup> Note on reserve and landwehr formations, from the Intelligence Bureau G.H.Q., August 25, 1914, 3 p.m.

units in the first line; on the contrary, as the Information Analysis of February, 1914, indicated, we considered that the presence of such units on any front would point to the conclusion that precisely on that part of the line no decisive operations would be undertaken.

It was this reasoning which guided me up to August 23rd, and it will serve to explain how it came about that in all our efforts to clear up the situation of the enemy, we never sufficiently took into account the matter of large reserve units, concluding as we did that it was quite natural that they would not make their appearance at the front during the first days.

It must be confessed that the use which the Germans made of their reserve army corps in August, 1914, was a surprise to us, and this surprise was the reason of errors in appreciation which we committed, more especially in regard to the wide development of the German manoeuvre towards the north.

To return now to the morning of August 8th, the following was the distribution of the enemy forces as we estimated it:

In Russia: four active army corps had already been identified; in Alsace and Lorraine, six; in Belgium, five, according to our own information, six according to Belgian calculations. A total of fifteen or sixteen army corps more or less completely identified.<sup>5</sup>

Since the German Army ought to mobilize twenty-six active corps, there remained about ten whose location had not been determined; these in all probability would be found hidden behind the impenetrable curtain of Metz-Thionville, prolonged by the temporary stronghold constituted by Luxembourg.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Around Liège, there were portions of the IX, VII, and X Corps (in time of peace constituting the Inspection of Hanover, commanded by General von Bülow) and possibly elements of the III Corps; to the left of the X Corps, elements of the IV which on the evening of August 7th were on the Ourthe to the east of Ferrières. To this calculation the Belgians added the XI Corps on the left of the X. Moreover, seven regiments of cavalry appeared to have crossed the Meuse north of Liège.

<sup>6</sup> Information reaching G.H.Q. during the 8th confirmed this general view and enabled the Intelligence Bureau to send out the following bulletin to our armies the next morning. Known elements of German active units: 17 identified against France and 4 against Russia (I, V, XVIII, XX).

Not identified, 5.

Location of forces opposed to France:

1. *Army of the Meuse*: two or three divisions of cavalry (one of them the 5th), five or six army corps (IX, VII, X, III, IV, perhaps XI).

It would seem that this army has reached its normal composition, as train movements towards Aix-la-Chapelle and Saint-With are no longer heavy.

2. *The Luxembourg-Thionville Group*: one or two cavalry divisions (one of them the 4th); 4 (?) army corps, one of them the VIII and one the XVIII (certain); perhaps the Saxon XIII and one corps not identified.

In this way it looked as though the main body of the enemy's forces was concentrated behind the Moselle position. This mass could equally well debouch towards the west or make a conversion towards the south, pivoting on Metz. As for the army of the Meuse, which appeared to have reached its normal position, it appeared destined to prolong the movement of the principal mass either towards the west or towards the south. The attack against Liège might be merely a precaution taken against the Belgian Army and having for its object nothing more than the seizing of the important bridge-head at that place.

These were merely hypotheses: it was too soon to build upon them any plan of manœuvre. I desired to make my decisions only when they could be based upon well-established facts; I was, therefore, led to wait before giving orders concerning the employment of our armies on the left wing, destined for the principal action.

The situation in Lorraine and in Alsace was quite different. Our troops there were in contact with the enemy, and my intention being to rest my right on the Rhine, there was every interest in trying to throw back the German forces in Alsace upon Strasbourg, thus effecting an economy in troops by shortening our front. In Lorraine it was important to fix the enemy in place and to make Nancy safe while the defences on the Grand Couronné were being constructed. The attack intended to be made against the enemy forces in this region might accomplish this result, while at the same time contributing to relieve the congestion on the Belgian front, or at least preventing the movement of German reserves towards the north. But it was certain that by reason of the danger which the positions of Metz and Strasbourg presented for us on our right and on our left, this attack could not be expected to attain any distant objective.

The forces constituting our First and Second Armies, consisting of ten corps, appeared to be quite sufficient to oppose the six German corps identified in this region; it, therefore, seemed to me possible, as I had indicated to General de Castelnau at the meeting of army commanders on August 3rd, to withdraw two corps from the Second Army and use

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3. *Group at Metz and to the east:* Three cavalry divisions; (?) army corps, among which the XVI and the Bavarian II (sure); the Bavarian III (probable).

Heavy detrainments are taking place in the region east of Metz, Han-sur-Nied, Bendorf.

4. *Strasbourg-Sarrebourg Group:* One cavalry division; (?) army corps, one of these the XIII, perhaps the Bavarian I; the XV.

5. *Fribourg Group:* XIV Bavarian Army Corps, one Bavarian reserve division, elements of landwehr and landsturm.

*Army Corps not identified:* II, VI, XIX, Guard Corps and reserve of the Guard.

them in the attack to be made against the forces around Metz and north of that place.

It was in this way that at the end of the first period of concentration I was led to contemplate an action as rapid as possible on the part of our First and Second Armies, whereas it seemed advisable to limit the efforts of the majority of our forces to simple measures of precaution, until such time as the situation on our left was cleared up.

In accordance with these ideas, on the morning of August 8th, I issued the orders contained in General Instructions No. I. This Instruction was intended to give army commanders information which would enable them to place each army corps in its proper place as it detrained. Foreseeing that the extreme left of our formation would for some time remain uncovered, I issued orders to the 4th Group of Reserve Divisions to organize a strongly fortified position in front of the Chimay Pass, around Virvens. During the course of the morning I gave the necessary indications to General Valabrègue, designated to command this group, when, accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Colonel des Vallières, he reported me at Vitry.

That day the Chief of Staff of the Fifth Army, General Hély d'Oissel, arrived, sent by his commander to lay before me the fears he felt lest the Germans should make an out-flanking movement with strong forces west of the Meuse. There was nothing I could reply except to point out that this anxiety seemed to me at least premature, especially as the manœuvre which he indicated looked to be, if our information was correct, out of proportion to the means at the enemy's disposal; moreover, I had already recognized the necessity of reinforcing this left flank, since it had been decided two days ago that the two excellent divisions from Africa, the 37th and the 38th, would be sent to the Fifth Army. In addition to all this, the Fifth Army was covered by the Cavalry Corps, which had received orders that in case it had to recross the Meuse it should move towards Marienbourg, on the left of General Lanrezac's army; finally, I informed General Hély d'Oissel of the information coming from the Belgians, which depicted the German troops engaged in the direction of Liège as being physically worn out and morally depressed. A French officer, Captain Prioux, who that day had come from Belgian G.H.Q., had confirmed this optimistic news.

*Sunday, August 9th.* General Instructions No. 1 had considerably enlarged the mission of the First Army. If this army was to succeed it was essential that the action of the VII Corps and the 8th Cavalry Division be vigorously pushed. Fortunately, the imperative order I had sent Gen-

eral Bonneau seemed to have produced an effect. During the night of the 8th/9th I received news that our troops had occupied Mulhouse without firing a shot, and I asked General Dubail to inform me as to the further intentions of the commander of the VII Corps; but the reply was far different from what I had expected. It stated that the troops of this corps were much fatigued and that they were incapable of resuming the offensive for one or two days. The short marches which these men had been called upon to make and the insignificant resistance of the enemy indicated to me that the worn out condition of the VII Corps was more due to the indecision of its commander than to any other cause. This partial check of our action in Upper Alsace seriously compromised the results expected to be attained by the operations of the First Army, and to these I attached a special importance. For as soon as a rapid conquest of Alsace was accomplished I should be able to transfer troops from my right to my left, where the principal operation was to be carried out.

I, therefore, deemed it necessary to make immediate changes in the command of some of the units of our extreme right. Moreover, I learned shortly afterwards that the VII Corps was being attacked at Mulhouse; under the orders of such a hesitating chief I was seriously disturbed concerning the outcome.

I now decided to form the Army of Alsace, and I asked the Minister of War to give the command of it to General Pau. The energy and great military reputation of this officer seemed to me fully to justify the choice. His Army was to comprise the VII Corps, the 8th Cavalry Division and the 1st Group of reserve divisions (under the command of General Archinard, to commence detraining on the 18th), five Alpine groups (which should begin to arrive on the 13th) and the 44th Division, expected for the 15th. In order to get exact information with regard to the situation on our right, I sent two of my officers with all haste to Belfort.

During the night of August 9th/10th, the unfortunate news of the loss of Mulhouse arrived; the VII Corps had allowed three hundred men to be captured there. According to the earliest information received, the corps commander was seriously to blame, for, without sufficient reason he had permitted the accumulation of a large number of troops in the interior of the town.

On the morning of the 9th important information came in concerning the British mobilization. When the British Government decided to enter the struggle, August 5th had been fixed upon as the first day of mobilization. As a consequence of this and in accordance with the arrangements that had been made in time of peace, the concentration transports



of the British Expeditionary Corps were to commence on our railways on August 11th. This would fix August 21st as the first day of operations. But various delays had taken place in the mobilization, brought about by circumstances of an internal nature, and the first day of British mobilization had been fixed for August 9th.

This made it impossible to hope that the British forces arriving on the Continent could be ready to move forward before the 26th.

I was thus presented with two alternatives: either delay the entrance of the French left into action until that date, and thus obtain the assistance of the British, or else start decisive operations without waiting for British support. The first solution presented the double inconvenience of leaving the Belgian Army too long without efficient help, as well as foregoing all the advantages of being the first to act and seizing the initiative. The second solution deprived us of the precious reinforcement which the British Expeditionary Corps would bring during the early operations.

There were grave objections to each of these solutions, but I chose the second; I then wrote to the President of the Republic to inform him of my decision, at the same time asking him to inform the British Government of the danger we would be incurring if Field Marshal French's army was too long in arriving. I also suggested that perhaps the British General Staff might be able to hurry the preliminary measures still to be effected.

As I had no further news of the rumoured armistice between the Germans and the Belgians, concerning which the President had spoken to me on the 7th, I asked him in the same letter to inform the Belgian Government that the moral support which would be furnished by our Cavalry Corps to the Belgian Army would not be the only assistance forthcoming; I also suggested that he urge the Belgians in their turn to continue the action they had so brilliantly started in the region of Liège.

*Monday, August 10th.* The news arriving from this extreme point in the theatre of operations was not alarming. While the town of Liège seemed to have been taken, the forts still held out, and the Belgian Army's morale was asserted to be excellent. A succession of reports continued to confirm us in the impression that the principal German manœuvre would not take place in Belgium. It was stated that the German corps in the region of Liège were not showing much activity, and the Russian Military Attaché in Brussels asserted that these corps were being relieved by reserve troops which were throwing up fortifications. It can be readily understood what interpretation we would give to such infor-



mation. More important still, on the 10th one of our agents arrived from Cologne with the news that fortifications were being constructed along the line Cologne-Bergheim-Arkelenz, and that heavy artillery was being deployed in support of this front. He asserted that there were no German troops facing Dutch Limbourg.

Moreover, this information, gathered as it was from various sources, seemed confirmed by the reconnaissance reports of our aviators, so that on this day, August 10th, we had the impression that the Germans were going to undertake the regular siege of Liège and that the movement of troops reported in the direction of Neufchâteau and Bastogne was the first step in the transport of a northern group of enemy forces into the region Bastogne, Marche, Rochefort and Libramont, and the covering of this movement.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, great activity continued to be reported in Lorraine and to the east of Metz.

I was thus led to hope that the Belgian Army would not have too heavy a blow directed against it in the near future and that it might continue to hold its position on the extreme left of the Allied line. Three days before, King Albert had addressed a proclamation to his Army containing most cordial expressions for the French Army; I seized this occasion to thank His Majesty and to express the hope that his soldiers and ours would soon be marching side by side to victory.

Our extreme right continued to be of immediate and pressing importance. Early on the 10th I was informed by the Minister of War that he had placed General Pau at my disposition and that this officer would arrive at G.H.Q. the same day to receive my instructions. This message was accompanied by a most forceful declaration from M. Messimy saying: "The Government demands that any general officer who does not perform his duty with the requisite firmness shall be brought before a general court-martial and shot within 24 hours."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Intelligence Report No. 31, August 10, 1914, 5 p.m., made by the Intelligence Bureau of G.H.Q.

<sup>8</sup> This communication came from the Minister's Chief of Cabinet, General Ebener, and was received by General Bélin; it was confirmed in a personal letter from M. Messimy which reached me the evening of August 10th, reading as follows:

Paris, August 10, 1914.  
12.30 p.m.

My dear General,

I wish to repeat to you what I asked General Ebener to telephone: If any officer serving under your orders, whatever be his grade, should show weakness or cowardice, he must be immediately brought before a court-martial and tried. The severest sentence, including that of death, should be applied. In the majority of cases the President of the Republic renounces the exercise of his right to pardon. You will receive notification to this effect.

While acknowledging the sincere admiration I feel for M. Messimy's energy, I am obliged to add that perhaps he went a little too far. Although General Bonneau had shown that it did not lie in his power to change his peace-time mentality to that required in war, it only went to show that his character was not of the sort to fulfil present requirements; but this did not constitute a reason for bringing him before a court. In time of peace it is very difficult to make an accurate estimate of men in what applies to character, and when war arrives it is precisely this quality which becomes the most essential in any chief. It was only natural that we should meet with surprises in this matter and that unexpected weaknesses should become disclosed. But my mind was fully made up on this subject: I would get rid of incapable generals and I would replace them by those who were younger and more energetic.

When General Pau arrived I discussed the situation with him and told him what I expected from the Army of Alsace. I asked him to send me as soon as he had established contact with his troops, a report accompanied by his recommendations. I assigned to him as chief of staff one of the officers of my own staff in whom I had the highest confidence, Lieutenant-Colonel Buat.<sup>9</sup>

*Tuesday, August 11th.* During the night of August 10th/11th, the officers I had sent to Belfort returned, bringing with them very complete reports. It would seem that the courage of our troops had not been at fault and that the losses at Mulhouse might have been in large measure avoided if the 8th Cavalry Division had been employed more energetically. Where the fault lay was evident, and I decided to make an immediate example by sending back to Paris the officer commanding that division and placing him at the disposal of the War Department, at the same time giving the command of the division to General Mazel.<sup>10</sup>

There was nothing to do but wait until such time as General Pau had taken command and put things in order. At the same time, as a

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As war has been forced upon us, we propose to carry it on as the revolutionaries did in 1793.

Yours,

MESSIMY.

<sup>9</sup> General Pau wanted to appoint General Roget as his chief of staff. But this officer was 68 years old and had left the army 6 years before. General Pau was good enough readily to accept my suggestion to take another man, one who was some 25 years younger than General Roget.

<sup>10</sup> As the consequence of an unfortunate affair which happened at the village of La Garde and which cost us some 2000 prisoners, I also decided, upon the recommendation of General de Castelpau, to relieve the General commanding the 2nd Division and place at its head General Varin.

means of allaying the excitement which the evacuation of Mulhouse had caused in official circles, I decided to send to Paris one of the officers who had just returned from Belfort with orders to give a detailed description of what he had seen to the President of the Republic and the Minister of War.

It was all the more important to make the facts clear, since the Swiss press had announced a serious defeat of the French in Alsace. It was pretended that we had lost more than 20,000 men in killed and wounded, that is to say, more than we had engaged. The impression produced had been serious, and it was essential to nail the lie to this report.<sup>11</sup>

Towards noon on the 11th I decided that the date of attack for our First Army and of the right corps of the Second Army should be fixed for the 14th, this date coinciding with the termination of our concentration transports. It was also important to facilitate the entry into action of the Army of Alsace by making an offensive movement to the west of the Vosges as soon as possible. Moreover, this date was the same as that fixed upon for the opening of the Russian operations, as a new telegram from M. Paléologue announced.<sup>12</sup>

*Wednesday, August 12th.* North of the Meuse the German Cavalry had

<sup>11</sup> The officer I sent to Paris, Major Maurin, brought back with him from Paris a copy of the following letter which King Albert had just sent to the President:

Louvain, August 11, 1914.

Great and Good Friend,

I thank you most heartily for the praise which General Joffre has bestowed upon our troops and which you were good enough to convey to me in your letter of August 9th. The Belgian Army and myself set great store by this appreciation; we are very proud of it. Speaking of the co-operation of our soldiers with their French and English brothers-in-arms, General Joffre wrote to Your Excellency: "We hope that the Belgian Army will continue its action so brilliantly commenced on the north of the left flank of our armies." I can reply in the most formal fashion to this wish on the part of the French General-in-Chief. The French Army can fully count upon the assistance of the Belgian Army on the left wing of the Allied armies, within the limits imposed by its strength and equipment, as well as by the necessity of ensuring the maintenance of its communications with Antwerp, where its ammunition and supplies are located. In order to keep myself informed regarding the operation of the Allied armies, and in this way co-ordinate our own movements with theirs, I have designated Major Melotte for service at General Joffre's headquarters, as soon as his mission with General Sordet is terminated. I have assigned Colonel d'Orgé de Marchevette to General Lanrezac's headquarters. I will be very glad to receive any officers that you may desire to have attached to my headquarters.

Please be assured, Great and Good Friend, of the profound gratitude of the Belgian Army and of its Chief for the fraternal help which in these critical moments the French Army is bringing them: to this I add my earnest prayers for a common victory and the expression of my most cordial sentiments.

ALBERT.

<sup>12</sup> Telegram from St. Petersburg dated August 9, 1914, 9.16 p.m. from M. Paléologue, telephoned by General Ebener at 10.30 a.m. August 10th and received by General Bélin. This telegram gave a general outline of the Russian plan of operations: the Wilna Army supported by the Warsaw Army, marching towards Koenigsberg.

reached Diest and Tirlemont, and this progress of the enemy seemed to have profoundly impressed the Belgian staff, for on the morning of the 12th we received an appeal from King Albert urging the Allies to come as quickly as possible to the rescue of his Army and announcing that if the Germans attacked with superior forces he would be obliged to retire to the protection of Antwerp. The officer who communicated this appeal to me from the King insisted that our Cavalry Corps cross to the north of the Meuse as soon as possible.

The intentions of the Belgian Government, as thus indicated, were no great surprise to me, and our duty to support the Belgians was quite evident. However, there was nothing which went to prove that the German Cavalry reported to be north of the Meuse was heavily supported, since a serious check had been inflicted upon it on the 12th near Haelen by a Belgian cavalry division supported by an infantry brigade. On the other hand, it seemed that the Germans were in stronger force south of the Meuse than we had supposed to be the case up to this time, two new army corps having been identified there. Under these circumstances it would have been difficult to relieve the Cavalry Corps of the mission assigned it, namely, to cover our Fifth Army. The only thing that seemed possible to do for the moment, and indeed this was altogether necessary, was to establish the continuity of our front by joining up our extreme left with the Belgian Army at Namur. To effect this, I authorized General Lanrezac, in compliance with his request, to move his left corps to the region of Dinant; I also directed towards Philippeville the two African divisions which were about to begin detraining.

At this time considerable uncertainty still reigned regarding the date on which the British would come into action alongside of us. *On August 9th* Colonel Huguet, our Military Attaché in London, arrived at G.H.Q. and informed me of what had been going on in England since the declaration of war. At first it had been decided that mobilization would commence August 5th. According to our arrangements with the British, this would cause the movements of British troops on our railways to begin on the 11th and the units detrained should be ready to start operations on the 21st. But during a Council of War held at Downing Street on Wednesday the 5th, the whole matter had been left open: date of mobilization, composition of the expeditionary corps, zone of concentration.

On August 6th Lord Kitchener had been appointed Secretary of State for War and the first day of mobilization had finally been fixed for the 9th. The British Government had indicated their intention of con-

centrating the forces sent to the Continent in a zone sufficiently in rear of the front to make it certain that they would be able to have some rest before beginning battle. For this purpose they had selected the region around Amiens, expecting to organize a defensive position on the Somme.

These proposals not only completely upset the general dispositions of the Allied forces at the most sensitive point of our battle line, but they also presented the inconvenience of delaying the probable date of entry into action of the British troops, and this at the very moment, as I have just related, when the Belgians were urging us to come to their assistance. I have stated above the solution I had adopted and it will be remembered that I asked the President of the Republic to represent to the British Government the grave inconvenience which would result from such a great delay in the arrival of their troops. I directed Colonel Huguet upon his return to London to urge the British General Staff not to change the zone of concentration of Field Marshal French's army, for if that were done our whole plan would be ruined.

*Thursday, August 13th.* On the 13th I learned with satisfaction that after a meeting which had been held in Lord Kitchener's office, the British Government had finally accepted my point of view and had consented to a zone of concentration immediately joining that of the French armies. This was a most important point gained. On the other hand, I learned at the same time that the Government, under the influence of a public opinion perpetually agitated by the fear of a descent upon England, had found it necessary to hold back two infantry divisions on the Island. Under these conditions the British Expeditionary Corps would be reduced to four infantry divisions and five brigades of cavalry. The two divisions retained in England would cross as soon as circumstances permitted.

This solution, although better than I had apprehended, risked putting our left in a critical position, and I had reason to fear that it might be attacked before the concentration was terminated. Indeed, according to the calculations of our Intelligence Bureau, this date of the 13th which had been decided upon was precisely the one on which the strategic deployment of the Germans on their base of departure would be completed, and it was more than likely that they would immediately advance. This would mean that it would be impossible for us to seek battle farther forward than the Semoy and the Chiers.

In view of this situation, I directed the First and Second Armies, which were ready for action, to attack on the 14th. Dubail was to move against Sarrebourg with three corps, flanked on their right by the XIV Corps,



and Castelnau was to attack with his three right corps, while his IX Corps and the reserve divisions protected Nancy. To the Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies I sent merely certain instructions regarding the defensive measures they were to take.

The morning of the 13th I read the reports which General Pau had sent in during the night and in which he depicted our troops as being very tired and much demoralized. The VII Corps and the 57th Reserve Division were falling back under the guns of Belfort. General Pau considered that inefficiency in the command was in large part responsible for this situation and he requested that General Bonneau be replaced. I accepted this recommendation without hesitation and named General Vautier to command the VII Corps.

In respect to these changes I may as well say here that I was quite conscious of the illegality I was committing in making them. The general officers whom I removed from their commands had received their *lettres de service* from the Minister of War, and legally he alone could rescind them. I perfectly understood that if our affairs went well I would probably be covered, but if things turned out badly there was no doubt but that I would be attacked. Nevertheless, with full consciousness of the responsibility I was assuming in the face of my countrymen, I determined not to hesitate to take this action, for it seemed to me absolutely necessary and urgent.

In the months which followed I was often obliged to have recourse to these unpleasant measures; but I declare upon my conscience that I never did so without being firmly convinced that I was acting in the interests of the country's safety. Many of these removals cost me dearly, and I think that it will be believed when I now say, as I look back calmly across the years, that never in the course of my whole career did I ever have to perform a duty more difficult or more disagreeable than that of relieving from their commands generals—some of them my friends, all of them perfectly honourable men—whose force of character had proved unequal to the rough test of war. I might also add that whilst the honesty of my purpose gave me strength to meet this difficult duty, the vigorous fashion in which I was supported by the Minister of War brought me a comforting tranquillity of mind for which I desire here to express my gratitude. But, unfortunately, Ministers do not last forever!

Late in the evening of the 13th great news arrived. The Grand Duke Nicholas informed me through M. Paléologue that the armies of Wilna and Warsaw would take the offensive at daybreak the next morning.



Russia was thus surpassing all our expectations by engaging battle at the same time as ourselves. For this loyal act of comradeship-in-arms,<sup>12</sup> all the more praiseworthy in that the Russian concentration was far from terminated, the Czar's Army and the Grand Duke Nicholas have a right to France's undying gratitude.

The wildest rumours continued to be circulated regarding the arrival of Austrian units on our front. From Switzerland and Italy precise details continued to arrive. It was no longer one army corps but four that had been identified. It was stated that Austria had asked Switzerland and even Italy to permit the passage of several corps across their territory. No real confirmation of these rumours could be obtained; only one thing seemed sure and that was that no one had yet *seen* an Austrian. From Basle dependable correspondents reported merely the presence of a few Tyrolean elements, without being able to estimate their number. The stories coming from Italy were also contradictory. The withdrawal of troops from Bardonnèche was announced, while at the same time they talked of the despatch of Alpine troops and howitzers towards Aosta and the Little St. Bernard.

*Friday, August 14th.* Our uncertainty regarding the strength and intentions of our adversaries in the north continued undiminished. The Belgians appeared to have met with some successes, but now for the first time reports stated that infantry columns were crossing the Meuse below Liège. It was impossible as yet to determine whether these were marching against the Belgian Army or whether they were intended to complete the investment of the fortress.

Our aviation for the moment brought us no definite information. General Sordet, in a report dated August 13th and which I received the next morning at 9 o'clock, declared that he knew very little concerning the enemy and he thought that reports coming from aviators must be accepted with much caution. "While I cannot state it with certainty," he added, "my impression is that on the 12th there were no large bodies of infantry this side of the line Ourthe-Houffalize-Luxembourg." Behind this line activity was reported. It seemed likely that the movements taking place under cover of the field works erected along the Ourthe were those of the army corps destined to form a mass of manœuvre on the enemy's right. Taking all that we knew into consideration, we estimated at eight army corps and four cavalry divisions the forces which lay between the northern point of the Grand Duchy and the frontier of Dutch Limbourg.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Intelligence Report No. 38. Intelligence Bureau G.H.Q., August 14th, 6 a.m.

This calculation corresponded to what we had considered possible by a study of the detraining facilities offered by German railway stations along this front. The situation here was not disquieting, since we could put into line ten French active divisions and three reserve divisions; there were also six Belgian divisions resting upon the fortified system Antwerp-Namur-Liège-Maubeuge, while there would shortly arrive four British infantry divisions and one cavalry division.

On the morning of the 14th we had thus located all the German active army corps except the I, XVII, XX, V and II; these we thought were facing the Russians, and we had the impression that a great German mass of manœuvre was being brought together behind the Ourthe.

However, a very interesting piece of information reached us during the night of the 13th/14th. For the first time, infantry columns had been seen north of Liège. They were reserve troops. This information was important, but by reason of the ideas prevailing with us in regard to the use which the Germans would make of reserve troops, we could not as yet decide whether these infantry columns were being moved against the Belgian field army or were intended to complete the investment of Liège.

Both Generals Gallieni and Lanrezac came to see me on the 14th. The former arrived in the morning, sent by the Minister of War. I realized that he was trying to bring up the question of operations and that M. Messimy must have told him to indicate to me the Minister's ideas as to how they should be conducted. If one stops to think of the great responsibility which rested upon me, it can easily be imagined how disagreeable this suggestion was; I, therefore, broke off the conversation rather brusquely.

Lanrezac arrived early in the afternoon. He told me of his fears that the Germans would make a wide out-flanking movement north of the Meuse. I have already said that on this date, August 14th, the information we had received did not justify, for the moment, a belief in such a manœuvre. On the contrary, the main body of the enemy forces seemed to be massing behind the Ourthe, south of the troops which were masking Liège. On the left bank, the German forces so far reported consisted only of cavalry and a few columns of infantry. Moreover, the region Maubeuge-Hirson had been reserved for the detraining of British troops, and I would risk creating disorder in this zone if I authorized General Lanrezac to move a part of his army into it. I was obliged, therefore, to tell the commander of the Fifth Army that for the moment

his fears appeared to me to be premature, and that until further orders his mission consisted in marching to meet the enemy troops reported to be in rear of the Ourthe and of the line Houffalize-Luxembourg.<sup>14</sup>

General Lanrezac had hardly returned to his headquarters at Rethel when he wrote me a letter in which he once more voiced his fears and asked me to prepare forthwith for the eventual movement of his army towards the region Givet-Maubeuge, leaving one army corps and two reserve divisions on the Meuse in liaison with the Fourth Army.

*Saturday, August 15th.* When this request reached me we had just received news from Belgium concerning the enemy forces north of Liège. These appeared to be more important than at first we had thought. During the whole of the 14th, corps and divisions had been crossing the Meuse on four bridges constructed at Visé. The Belgian Army was no longer in communication with the forts of Liège and it knew nothing definite as to the number of German troops which were besieging the place.

This information was of a nature to make me realize that the eventuality which, up to the present, I had believed could be disregarded, was now quite within the realm of possibility. Did it not look as though the Germans were going to prolong their manœuvre to the north of the Meuse? I asked myself. For the first time this hypothesis began to take actual shape, and it was under its influence that I answered General Lanrezac's letter, saying that in my opinion nothing but good could come of his making preliminary arrangements for the move towards the north of two army corps in addition to the I Corps. But I pointed

<sup>14</sup> At a later period General Lanrezac asserted that it was impossible not to perceive that the German manœuvre would develop north of the Meuse, and he asserted that he had no doubts on the subject. This statement appears somewhat exaggerated. In fact all that we have learned since the end of the war concerning the German manœuvre proves that von Kluck's Army passed through Aix-la-Chapelle on the 13th; on the 14th his advanced guards reached the Meuse near Visé and on the 16th they entered Bilsen and Tongres. Admitting that our means of investigation were perfect, it would have been an impossibility on the morning of the 17th for us to have learned of the presence of these advanced guards on the left bank of the Meuse. For to be able to conclude that the German manœuvre was going to take place north of the river, as General Lanrezac asserts he knew would be the case, it would have been necessary to have the gift of divination. In reality, for reasons already given, and as will be seen as the recital of the following days unfolds, the information coming in was always slow, incomplete and contradictory; nothing but attacks of the Belgian forces against the advanced guards of the Germans would have lifted the veil and shown us what was going on. The Germans succeeded in moving their columns behind a screen of cavalry supported by small infantry forces. The fact that the Belgian Army was north of the Meuse in the region of Louvain was sufficient to explain the presence of German forces there without one's being justified in deducing from such a fact that the great manœuvre of the enemy's armies would take place north of the river.

out to him that the menace was far from being immediate and its certainty was in no way absolute; therefore, the movement must not be executed except upon my order.

Since the enemy forces reported north of the Meuse might threaten our communications by railway and canal with the north, I asked the Minister of War, under whose authority this region—that of the I Corps—still remained, to permit me to take the three divisions still unemployed and establish with them a barrage from the sea to Maubeuge; likewise, to place the First Region under my authority, so that I might communicate directly with General Percin who commanded it. This was the origin of the d'Amade Group.<sup>15</sup>

It was evidently important to follow with close attention these first indications that infantry troops were crossing to the north of the Meuse. Unfortunately, the day of August 15th was far from bringing us concordant information. At 5 p.m. the Governor of Maubeuge telegraphed that 200,000 Germans were in process of crossing the Meuse between Maestricht and Visé; he also stated that in order to complete the investment of Liège the enemy had sent over to the left bank of the river 10,000 cavalry accompanied by artillery. These forces had crossed on pontoon bridges between Flone and Hermalle and were moving towards Waremme. The same evening new information contradicted that given by the Governor of Maubeuge. The zone around Liège, Verviers, Spa and Rouvieux was reported to be empty, and the information concerning the crossing of the river by troops of all arms north of Liège was declared inexact. At the end of the afternoon I learned that our I Corps in front of Dinant had been attacked by a corps which seemed to be covering the movement of several other corps that were in the process of slipping towards the north-west between Namur and Liège. This attack, taken in conjunction with the information that large forces were in Belgian Luxembourg, seemed to indicate that the enemy now intended to pronounce his principal effort with his right wing north of Givet. All these reports appeared to point to the necessity of placing between the Sambre and the Meuse the left wing of the Fifth Army, which would thus reinforce our position of envelopment in relation to the German right-flank; for the latter would be caught between the Belgian Army, whose situation continued to be represented to me as most favourable, the fortified place of Namur and the Fifth Army, posted behind the

<sup>15</sup> At the outbreak of the war, General d'Amade was in command of the army which was destined to operate in the Alps. When Italy announced her intention to remain neutral this army and its chief became available for other duty, as has already been related.

Meuse above Namur. The requisite orders were sent out during the evening of the 15th and the morning of the 16th.

*Sunday, August 16th.* At noon on the 16th, Field Marshal Sir John French, who had reached Paris the evening before, came to see me, accompanied by his Chief of Staff, General Murray. This was the first time that I had ever seen the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. He had made a visit to President Poincaré the day before and he seemed to be favourably impressed by the atmosphere of confidence he had observed in official spheres. He gave me at once the feeling that he was a loyal comrade-in-arms, firmly attached to his own ideas and, while bringing us his full support, anxious not to compromise his Army in any way. He let me understand that the instructions of his Government were specific in requiring him to consider himself wholly independent, and that he could only offer us the collaboration of his Army.

I perfectly well understood this point; it was entirely natural that England should not consent to subordinate her troops to any Allied commander. I never had any illusions on this subject, although I realized that the absence of a single authority to direct all the Allied forces composing our left would be a serious cause of weakness. The only thing to do was to take things as they were and try to get the best results out of collaboration and mutual confidence.

Our conversation then bore upon the date on which the British Army would be ready to start operations. I had counted on the 21st of August, but Sir John informed me that on that date his army would be ready only to push forward small detachments for the protection of the detrainment of the main body, which would not be ready to move before the 24th. I pointed out all the unfortunate results that this delay would cause, and he promised to reduce it as much as possible.

We then examined the general situation of the enemy, such as we estimated it at this moment. I emphasized the fact that we were very imperfectly informed regarding the troops opposite the Belgian Army on the north bank of the Meuse, although according to the latest reports there seemed to be only cavalry in this region: the important forces of this arm assembled around Hannut were most likely intended to cover, on the left bank of the river, the movement of German columns previously reported around Liège, and which appeared to compose the principal mass of manœuvre of the adversary. We then studied the question of the best manœuvre for us to undertake. I indicated to the Field Marshal that, as regarded our north wing, the knowledge we had of the enemy forces was so lacking in precision that I could not give any



exact form to my intentions. My idea was to undertake a general action with French, British and Belgian troops against the group of enemy forces in the north. The aid I desired from the British Army would consist in having it move as quickly as possible north of the Sambre, ready to march against Nivelles, either on the left of the Fifth Army, if the movement was towards the north, or in echelon behind the left of this army, if the march was made towards the east. Sordet's Cavalry Corps would protect the movement of the British Army. As for the Belgian Army, I considered that, while covering Brussels and Antwerp, its rôle should consist in acting upon the outer flank of the German forces, taking them if possible in reverse.

Sir John promised to comply as far as he could with my wishes,<sup>r</sup> and he told me that he would immediately get into touch with General Lanrezac, whose great ability in the matter of manœuvre I pointed out to him. He left me to pass the night at Rheims.



### CHAPTER III

*The battles on the frontier, August 17/24, 1914*

**SUNDAY, August 17th.** The news received from the front during the day of the 17th was quite good. The First and Second Armies appeared to be moving forward under favourable conditions and in Upper Alsace considerable bodies of the enemy were reported to be in retreat. From Belgium nothing definite regarding the enemy was received; however, it seemed that only one infantry brigade had crossed to the left bank of the Meuse north of Liège, this brigade being reported as near Tongres; two cavalry divisions, which were moving towards the Sambre, had been held up and beaten by the Belgian troops; they had fallen back upon Gembloux. The situation, therefore, seemed favourable, and it was with great surprise that during the afternoon I learned that the Belgian Government had decided to establish itself in Antwerp. It was necessary at any price to prevent King Albert's Army from following this movement, and the only way to effect this was to have him clearly feel the support of our presence. I repeated to General Lanrezac the order to push our Cavalry Corps to the north of Namur and make contact with the Belgians.

**Tuesday, August 18th.** The whole interest now was concentrated upon our left. On the morning of the 18th I learned that the Second Army had reached Château-Salins, Dieuze and Marsal, and that the First Army had entered Sarrebourg. In Alsace the German XIV and XV Corps appeared to have disappeared. Where was their main force?

The termination of our concentration moves was now imminent and the time had come to decide upon the nature of our manœuvre. My main preoccupation, one which had never been absent from my thoughts since the war started, was to decide upon my manœuvre only when it could be directed definitely against enemy forces which had been clearly identified and located. It was also essential that the action be carefully masked, in order to ensure to us the benefit of surprise. But the information we had was still insufficient to enable us to predict the amplitude

of the enemy's manœuvre and his intentions. On the 18th of August a rigorously objective study of the question, eliminating all imagination and based solely upon information we possessed at that moment, made it impossible to say what manœuvre the enemy was preparing. The reports which had come in led us to conceive his order of battle as being the following:

On the left bank of the Meuse we were sure of the presence of only two cavalry divisions, operating between Jodoigne and Hannut. On the right bank, between Huy and Liège, there was a group, under the orders of General von Bülow, of four army corps (VII, IX, X & Guard), followed in the second line by three reserve corps. These troops appeared to compose the Second Army. It was possible that the First Army consisted of the troops around Liège and in the region of Visé.

Another group, comprising four army corps, appeared to be the one which had attacked Dinant and had pushed elements against Yvoir and Beauraing.

The third group appeared to be assembling in the region Neufchâteau-Recogne; its advanced elements had not passed the front Neufchâteau-Saint-Hubert. The region around Arlon was quite strongly occupied.

This was the outline as to the enemy's right wing as furnished by our information; but what remained unknown was the amplitude which he intended to give to the movement of this wing towards the north. In the region of Liège there was evidently a disturbing accumulation of forces. Did the enemy propose to march up both sides of the Meuse between Givet and Brussels? Or, as we had believed up to the present, did he intend to engage north of the Meuse only a small fraction of his forces, while with the main body of his northern mass (kept to the south of the river) he would try to attack the left flank of our Fourth Army, engaged against the central mass of the Germans?

Under the first hypothesis, our Fifth Army, operating in liaison with the British and Belgian Armies, would seek to out-flank to the north the left wing of the enemy, while our armies of the centre (the Third and Fourth) would attack his central group from south to north in the general direction of Neufchâteau. I had reason to expect that the Fifth Army, increased by the 4th Group of reserve divisions and by the XVIII Corps (taken from the Second Army), using the fortress of Namur as a support, could accomplish this mission. My idea was that we could assign 19 of our 48 active divisions to the attack to be made by our Third and Fourth Armies.

Under the second hypothesis, the British and Belgian Armies, ap-

parently, would be sufficient to hold in check the German forces north of the Sambre and the Meuse. The Fifth Army would move by Givet and Namur in the direction of Marche, attacking the flank of the enemy's group that was south of the Meuse.

I informed General Lanrezac concerning these projects; I likewise communicated them to the King of the Belgians and to Sir John French. For this purpose I despatched to their headquarters Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard, who was leaving with the instructions I had just drawn up for the French armies on the left.<sup>1</sup>

About 11.30 a.m. Colonel Génie telephoned that German infantry movements were taking place towards the north, creating much excitement at Belgian headquarters. During the evening we learned from Colonel Aldebert, assigned to Belgian G.H.Q., that troops belonging to the German X Corps had crossed to the left bank of the Meuse by the bridge at Huy, and that 8000 men of the IX Corps were at Landen, pushing detachments to the Gette at Haelen, at Tirlemont and at Beverloo. He informed us that at 3 o'clock the decision had been taken to draw back the Belgian advanced posts to the Dyle and to move headquarters to Malines.

It thus appeared that a number of the elements belonging to the German group south of the Meuse had already crossed to the left shore. We also learned that bridges had been established at Huy, Ampsin, Ombret, Rosa and Seraing. Finally, there were indications in the region of Bastogne—Neufchâteau that a movement of forces was taking place in a north-westerly direction.

It, therefore, looked as though the first of the eventualities I had anticipated in my instructions that morning to our left armies was on the point of being realized. Therefore, the Fifth Army must be reinforced, and for this purpose I decided to send the IX Corps into the region Sedan-Poix-

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Brécard arrived at Louvain, the King's headquarters, on the evening of the 18th, but he there learned of the retreat of the Belgian Army. When he reached British G.H.Q. the Commander-in-Chief was not there. The next day Sir John French replied as follows, offering no objections:

"You envisage two hypotheses. The first corresponds to the case in which an important mass of from 4 to 6 corps crosses to the north of the Meuse; you oppose this movement with the Fifth Army north of the Sambre and the Meuse, supported by the Cavalry Corps, the British Army and the Belgian Army; these forces will endeavour to out-flank to the north the German attack. In case only one or two German army corps pass to the north of the Meuse, the Fifth Army, crossing the Meuse between Namur and Givet, would take the German force in flank, while the British, the Belgians and the Cavalry Corps would protect the flank of the French Fifth Army and would take as their objective all the German forces north of the river."

In sending me the above, Sir John French assured me of his most hearty co-operation.

Térroun, with a view to permitting the extension of this army farther to the north.

In order to enable General Ruffey to devote himself entirely to his offensive operation, I decided to create the Army of Lorraine and place it under the command of General Maunoury. It was to be composed of the 3rd Group of reserve divisions (originally assigned to the Third Army), the 67th Division, still available, and the 65th and 75th Reserve Divisions, coming from the Alps. The mission of this new army was to cover the right flank of the Third Army against forces which might debouch from the entrenched camp of Metz, by progressively investing this place from the west. I asked the Minister of War to place General Maunoury at my disposal for this, as I had a special admiration for him and had often regretted that a pitiless age limit had removed him from the command of troops just at the moment that hostilities broke out.

The Minister replied the next day that General Maunoury, who was at that time charged with the inspection of army corps regions in the West, would be placed at my disposal.<sup>2</sup>

*Wednesday, August 19th.* The night of August 18th/19th continued to

<sup>2</sup> Referring to the correspondence which the Minister and I exchanged during the month of August, 1914, it may be interesting to reproduce the following letter. It came in reply to a report I had sent to Paris on the 17th, announcing the taking of Sarrebourg, and to two protests which I had made, one against the sending of projectiles and equipment to Belgium, the other against an order given directly by the Minister to fortify Dijon. I ended my letter by saying that my responsibility was already great enough and that I could not accept the result of decisions taken without my knowledge. My sole reason for quoting the reply I received is to show the sympathetic and confident tone which characterized it.

Paris: 8/8/14. 11 a.m.

My dear General and Friend,

1. I was sure of it. I didn't say anything to those about me, but I had the most ardent and entire confidence in the success of our arms. I do not wish to send congratulations to the troops on the part of the Government until the success has been definitely established. But you must tell them for us of our delight and pride! Tell them of the burning faith we have in their heroism, in the intelligence of our officers, in the tenacity of our race. I wish I could embrace you!

2. You complain about our having sent the Belgians ammunition and gun slings. I understand your objections. They are quite justified. But really this business of Liège was one of such enormous strategic importance that it was absolutely incumbent upon us to make some recognition. Indeed, when we consider the delay effected upon the Germans' entry into Belgium, we will easily get the worth of those 100,000 rounds of field-gun ammunition before two days have passed.

3. You were quite right to send us the first flag; its arrival stirred all Paris with a sensation of joy and pride. It is now in the Invalides—waiting for others to be added.

4. As to Dijon, which I beg you to remark is not in the Army zone, I have countermanded the orders, since fortune has smiled upon us. But I beg to insist upon this point: Dijon lies outside of the zone of the Armies: in that zone I forbid myself the right to give any instructions or orders.

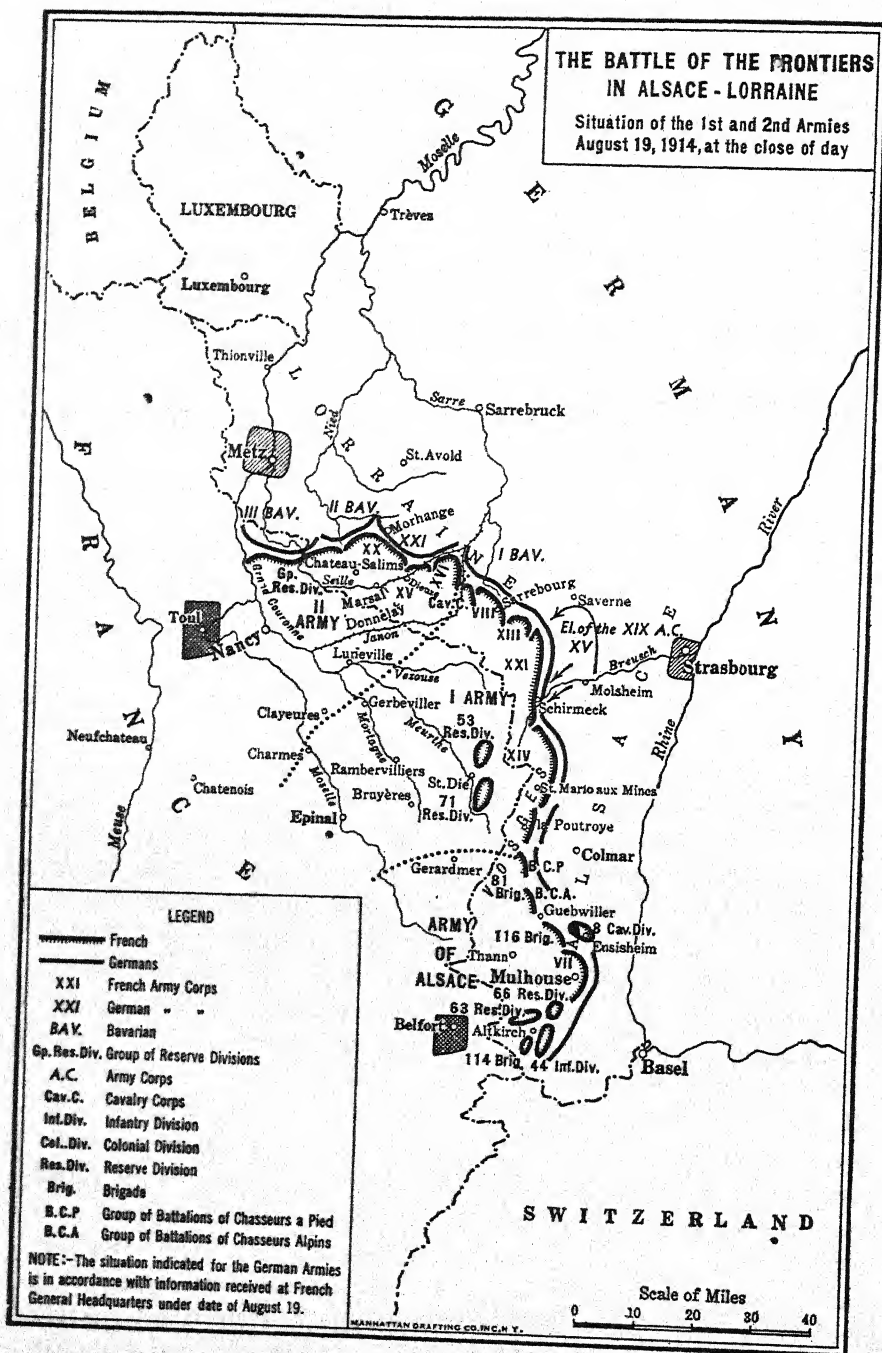
Affectionately yours,

MESSIMY.



# THE BATTLE OF THE FRONTIERS IN ALSACE - LORRAINE

Situation of the 1st and 2nd Armies  
August 19, 1914, at the close of day





bring us more precise information regarding the crossing of German troops from the right to the left bank of the Meuse. The regiments identified belonged to the IV, VII and X Corps; the cavalry had reached Diest. Our Cavalry Corps, in liaison with a mixed Belgian brigade, had driven back the mounted troops reported around Gembloux; but on reaching Ramillies it had met with an organized resistance.

During the afternoon a series of reports came in. First, towards 4 p.m. Colonel Génie informed us by telephone that, following a fight which had taken place the day before in front of Tirlemont, in which German troops of all arms had been engaged, the Belgian Army had received orders to draw closer to Antwerp, its left even entering the perimeter of the forts. In falling back the Belgians had uncovered Brussels. But what was still more grave, we thus lost all contact with the Belgian Army, and I had to give up the hope I had nourished of seeing it actively participate in the envelopment of the German right.

Our Cavalry Corps and the fortified place of Namur were now separated from the main body of the Belgian Army. General Michel, commanding at Namur, reported that he had only three brigades; these he was concentrating north-east and south-east of the town, and he requested that the Franco-British Army cross the Sambre and ensure the safety of the north-west and south-west zones. The Belgians also stated that important forces were passing over the Meuse between Liège and Huy; our air reconnaissances had located German columns at Hannut and Meeffe, moving in a north-westerly direction.

I confess that these reports caused me the greatest perplexity. Either we were concerned with weak forces intended merely to neutralize the Belgian Army—which would explain the march of German columns towards the north-west—or else we were dealing with important columns engaged in a movement against our northern wing. In the latter case the pushing of troops towards the north could only be obtained by weakening the German centre in Luxembourg, and the offensive I had prepared for the Third and Fourth Armies would be facilitated. Moreover, it seemed to me that the enemy forces engaged north of the Meuse could hardly be as important as was alleged, because of reasons connected with their supply. An examination of the map tended to show that the resistance offered by Liège and the destructions carried out by the Belgians would prevent any supplies being sent west of the line Verviers-Bastogne-Arlon; in the neighbourhood of Huy it would be particularly difficult to bring up rations as long as the forts around Liège held out.

At this moment we had no news that the forts had fallen, and we

could not imagine that when the Germans took Liège they would find the railway bridge intact.

It can thus be seen that the Belgian Army continued to be the source of gravest solicitude. The day of the 19th, however, ended with good news. Colonel Huguet informed me that during a conference held that morning at British Headquarters it had been announced that the detrain-ing of British troops in their zone of concentration had proceeded without difficulty, and Sir John French, being anxious to co-operate at the earliest moment in our operations, had examined the possibility of hastening the entry into action of his forces and had decided that their forward movement would begin on Friday the 21st.

It can be judged with what satisfaction I learned this news, for it gave me the hope that our British Allies would be at our side when the first battle opened.

*Thursday, August 20th.* The situation on the morning of the 20th seemed in general favourable. The assembling of the Franco-British forces was being completed under very good conditions, and before contact with the enemy had taken place. We were still without news of Liège and hence induced to believe that the place was still capable of resistance. Namur was about to receive the help of one of our reserve divisions. The Fifth Army was slowly concentrating between the Sambre and the Meuse, ready to undertake whatever manœuvre was decided upon. In the centre, the Second Army had occupied Dieuze and pushed its advanced guards to Morhange and Delme; it is true, however, that we had been unable to debouch from the lake region. Our First Army was in contact with an organized position on the other side of Sarrebourg, which it was now making dispositions to attack. The Army of Alsace, after a fight, had re-occupied Mulhouse.

In sending a report to the Minister of War at 8.45 a.m., I felt justified in giving it a tone of confidence. But this was going to be the last good news he would get from me for a long time. Indeed, shortly after this telegram had gone bad tidings continued to arrive without interruption at my headquarters, and the date stands out in my memory with particular vividness; for it marks the change in a situation which, up to that time and in spite of certain incidents, I had a right to consider as advantageous.

Towards 4 o'clock I received word from General de Castelnau that he had been violently counter-attacked along his whole front and that he was obliged to consider falling back upon Donnelay, Marshal, and the Grand Souffonné; his headquarters had been moved to Nancy. Towards

the end of the day another telegram came in stating that the Second Army would retreat during the night and take up positions on the line indicated.

On his side, General Dubail informed me that his right was the object of a severe attack on the part of the enemy and that he was obliged to give up his intended offensive. During the course of the afternoon Major Maurin, liaison officer with the First Army, telephoned that this army had fallen back; however, it hoped to be able to hold out on its new positions long enough to give Castelnau's army the time to reform. On the extreme right the Army of Alsace had stopped its advance. All of this serious news, which continued to arrive during the evening of the 20th and to be confirmed throughout the night, caused me considerable surprise. Indeed, the strength of the forces assigned to our right seemed quite sufficient to stop the enemy's left; for his active troops consisted, as far as we could learn, merely of three Bavarian army corps, the XXI, XV, and XIV, as well as some elements of the XIII Corps. I was all the more surprised since that very morning the Second Army had informed me that the impression prevailed that there was nothing in front of it except strong rear-guards.

As a measure of precaution I did not think it wise to weaken the Second Army, and about 6.30 p.m. I gave orders to suspend temporarily the entraining of the last division of the IX Corps and to place this division at the disposal of General de Castelnau. I also warned General Dubail to take all necessary steps to ensure the security of the right flank of his army.

While these events were unfolding on the right, the situation on our left suddenly cleared up.

In the first place, headquarters at Namur confirmed the fact that large bodies of troops had crossed to the left bank of the Meuse between Huy and Liège. On the afternoon of the 19th air reconnaissances had observed columns and bivouacs between Tirlemont, Jodoigne and the Meuse. On the 20th they reported that on the bridges below Namur nothing had crossed over during the whole morning except the trains of army corps which seemed to be in march against the Belgian Army. The movement in retreat of this army towards Antwerp was continuing and was expected to terminate during the 20th; however, in order to avoid reprisals, the Belgian Government had decided that the Civic Guard would not defend the Capital but would likewise fall back upon Antwerp. During the evening reports from the British and the Belgians arrived, bringing further and precise details: numerous columns had been seen north of



the Meuse; they were marching towards the west; their heads had reached the line Aërschot-Louvain-Jodoigne. These troops were estimated at four army corps, as a minimum.

The importance of this news can well be imagined, for now, for the first time, what was going on north of the Meuse was evident.

In the first place, the forces revealed were far stronger than we had believed up to this time; they were manifestly too important to be intended merely to crush the Belgian Army. Moreover, the front of march and the direction of the columns indicated that this mass was being moved against our left wing. The form of the manœuvre also revealed itself as much wider than we had anticipated, since it extended considerably to the north of Brussels.

Thus at the very moment when the Franco-British concentration was being completed, all our previous uncertainty became suddenly dissipated. It was evident that the Germans, concealing their movements by a cavalry screen, had succeeded in assembling a mass of manœuvre behind their extreme right. The general trend of all information now made clear the plan our adversaries were putting into effect: the German armies were marching with their right wing thrown forward.<sup>3</sup> Further confirmations, arriving during the night of August 20th/21st, reported five army corps, three divisions and two brigades of cavalry as being north of the Meuse.

Thus, the first of the two eventualities that I had envisaged in my letter of August 18th, that in which the enemy would march astride the Meuse between Givet and Brussels, was being realized. It was even taking place under favourable conditions. The movement of the enemy armies with their right wing advanced, would permit us to execute our intended manœuvre, viz., oppose the northern mass with the British and our Fifth Army, while with the Third and Fourth Armies we would attack the German Armies in Luxembourg in a south-north direction, and then, later on, take the northern group of the enemy in flank.

On the evening of the 20th, when the German manœuvre was clear to my eyes, I gave orders for the Third Army to begin its offensive movement the next day in the direction of Arlon. To the Fourth Army I gave instruction to commence its march on Neufchâteau, taking as an objective

<sup>3</sup> The rôle played by the German cavalry at the opening of the campaign of 1914 in masking a strategic manœuvre, does not seem to have received up to now the attention which it deserves. This rôle was extremely important and, to my mind, is calculated to modify certain ideas prevailing as to the usefulness of cavalry in war and its method of employment. Using the cavalry as a screen and marching only at night, it will always be possible to make concentrations which, hidden from observation, become capable of determining that "event" of which Napoleon was wont to speak.

the enemy forces in Luxembourg, which, moreover, had been reported as not very important. The mission of the Fifth Army was to hold the northern group of the enemy; the British Army was requested to co-operate in this action by moving its main body in the direction of Soignies.

*Friday, August 21st.* The orders for the execution of this manœuvre were despatched during the early hours of the 21st.

Although the retreat of the Belgians to Antwerp had broken the circle in which I had hoped to surround the German right, the situation did not appear to be bad. Indeed, the concentration north of the Meuse of such important enemy forces seemed impossible to accomplish unless the density of some other part of the front was reduced. Now, facing our right (First and Second Armies), the enemy had taken the offensive. This led me to conclude that the German line in Luxembourg was the least dense. This was a fortunate condition, it would seem, for enabling our Third and Fourth Armies to develop their manœuvre.

Although the main interest in the operations from now on lay in the north, the situation of our armies on the right, nevertheless, considerably disturbed me. It was essential for our right wing not to be overwhelmed. On the morning of the 21st I received two reports from my liaison officers, Majors Maurin and de Galbert, who informed me that my fears for this side of the line were well founded. Dubail had regretfully drawn back his line to the Vezouse, induced to this act by the retreat of the Second Army, although he might have held his ground. Castelnau hoped to re-organize his units under cover of the Grand Couronné, but he did not yet know whether this would be finished in time to enable him to accept a new battle on this position. If it proved impossible, he intended to continue his retreat towards the Hauts-de-Meuse, placing his left at Toul and his right on the wooded hills of Châtenois.

I was waiting with some impatience, as can be imagined, for news of this part of the front, when, about 3 p.m., I saw Major Fétizon arrive. He had been at Nancy, where, during the whole of the night of August 20th/21st, he had been present at the headquarters of the Second Army when the staff was arranging the retreat of the various army corps. On leaving, about 1 a.m., he had received from General de Castelnau his opinion as to the situation and the announcement of his immediate intentions; the General had then directed him to proceed immediately to G.H.Q. and report to me what he had said. The statement of the commander of the Second Army had seemed so serious to Major Fétizon that he preferred to put it in writing immediately and ask the General to sign it. The following is the report he presented to me:

The enemy is pursuing our retreating columns, and it seems probable that he will arrive tomorrow in front of Nancy. The Grand Couronné is occupied by the troops of the IX Corps and some elements of the 3rd Division which were not engaged yesterday. In rear of this I am making every effort to regroup the severely tried troops of the XV, XVI, and XX Corps, but they will hardly be in condition for battle tomorrow, nor perhaps the day after. The 2nd Cavalry Division is held up by the enemy in the First Army sector. The 10th Cavalry Division has just arrived, very tired, in the region around Manonviller. Only one portion of the reserve divisions, whose arrival had been announced, has been detrained up to this moment.

I will, therefore, oppose the enemy efforts with what troops I have. If I can gain 24 hours, I will try a counter-attack, since by the day after tomorrow the units will have acquired some cohesion and will be capable of a new effort. The situation looks to me very grave, and I feel it my duty to tell you so.

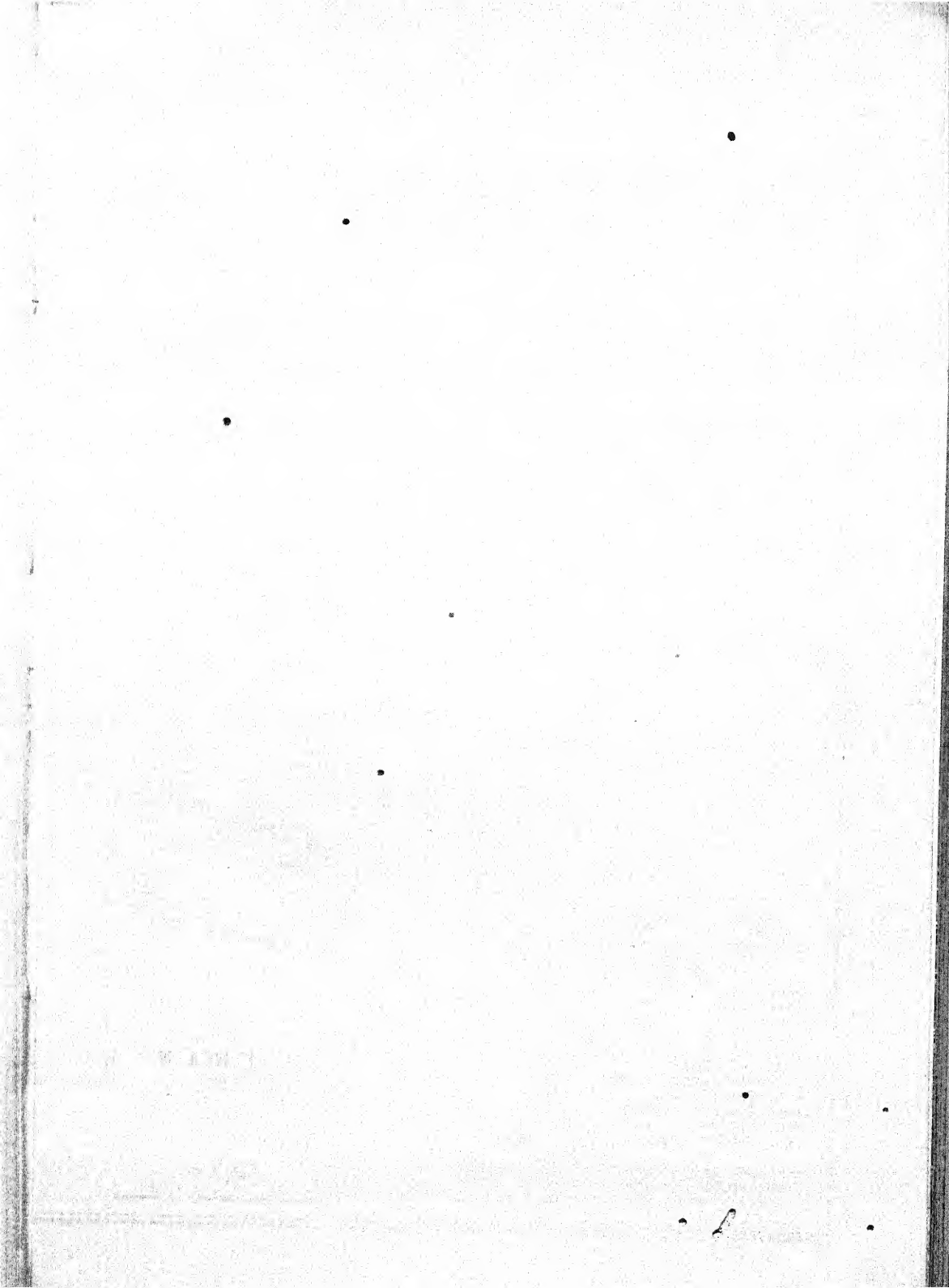
In the eventuality of a new retreat, I shall fall back under cover of the guns at Toul, in the direction of the Hauts-de-Meuse.

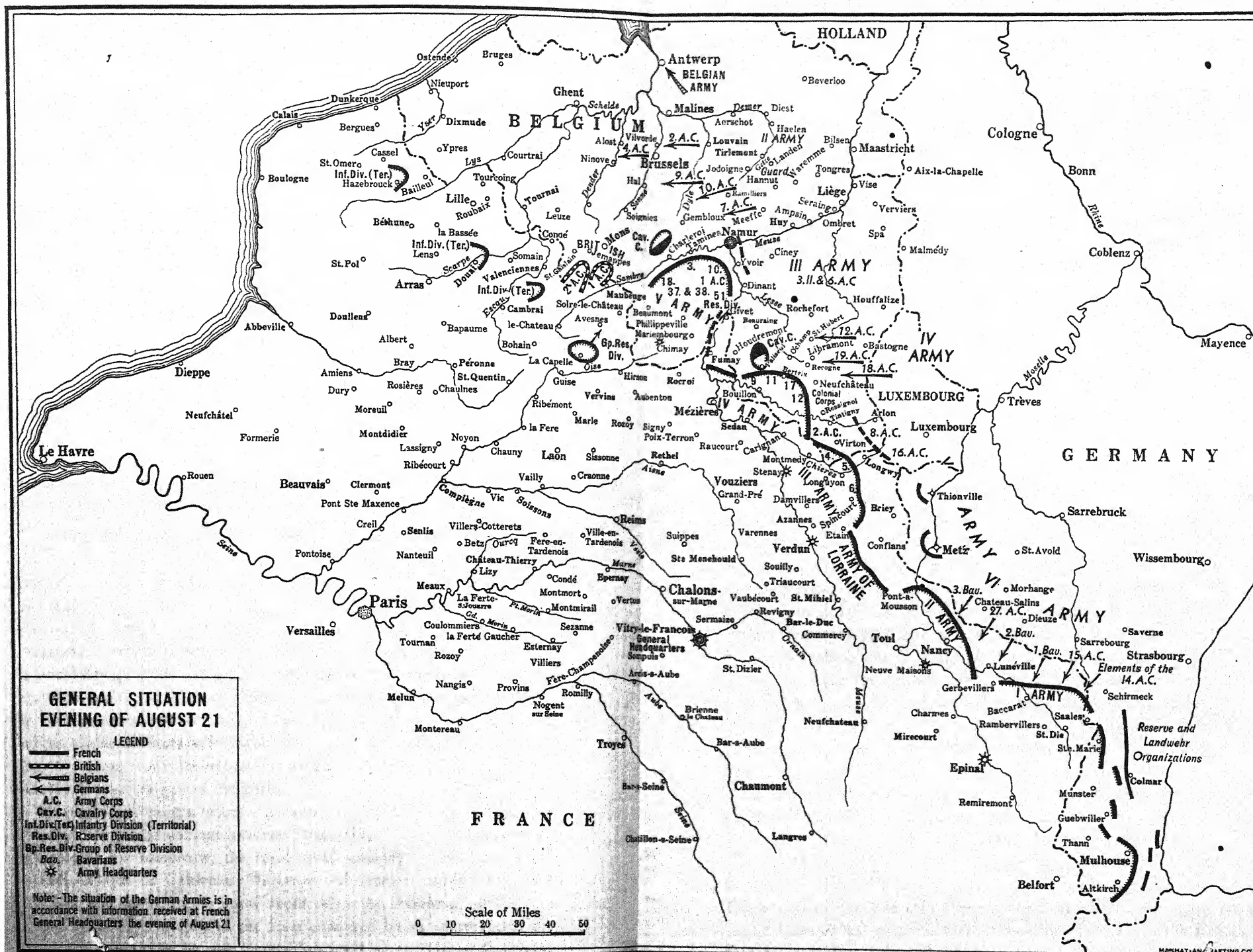
Another solution for extricating the Army from its very critical situation would be to have the forces now north of the road Nancy-Château-Salins, slip away towards Toul, and those south of this road (XX, XVI, XV Corps), towards Epinal, moving along the left bank of the Moselle. This would give us some chance of saving most of these forces and of reconstituting them later on. If the First Army refuses its left wing, as I think it will do, we could make a junction with it.

CASTELNAU.

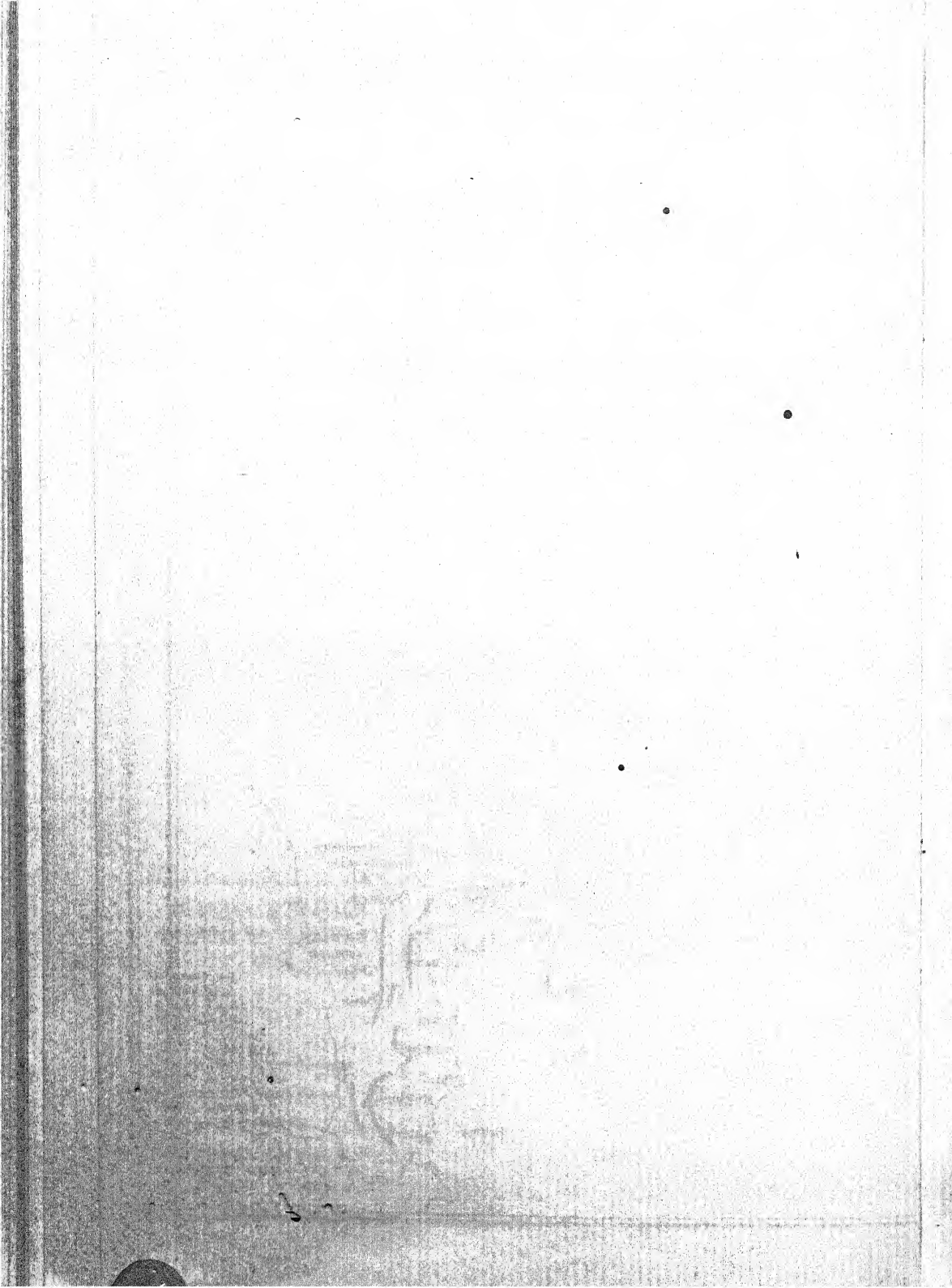
As can well be imagined, the situation thus presented seemed very grave. But I could not explain why the Second Army had fallen back so suddenly and under conditions which almost resembled a rout. The plans of the commander of the Second Army seemed to contemplate the early abandonment of the positions around Nancy, and a divergent retreat which would open up to the enemy a breach in our right wing. Such a possibility gave me the gravest concern, and I immediately had General de Castelnau informed by telephone that I considered it indispensable to hold on to the positions around Nancy for at least 24 hours, by reason of the disastrous moral effect which such a retreat would cause throughout the country and the influence it would have upon the success of our manœuvre now begun in the north.

During the evening a report, telephoned at 5 o'clock, informed me that the day had passed without incident. "I am, therefore, led to envisage no movement for tomorrow, the 22nd, until possibly a very late hour," added General de Castelnau; "however, information coming from our aviators will enable me to know about this more definitely." I was thus led to hope that, in spite of the fears expressed by its commander, the Second Army would be able to establish itself on the Grand Couronné









and along the Meurthe from Nancy to Lunéville, and there hold in check the enemy forces which had driven it back.

Towards 10 o'clock in the evening still better news arrived. "The situation of the Second Army has materially and morally improved," was the telephone message sent from Nancy by de Galbert; "the army this evening is holding the Grand Couronné and the Meurthe from Nancy to Lunéville; the enemy has advanced very little; during the evening he was still twelve miles from the Meurthe. Yesterday he experienced serious losses. All the Second Army train has retired in good order. The XX Corps is being rapidly re-organized, the XVI fairly fast, the XV with greater difficulty. There is no more talk of falling back behind the Moselle."

Thus, there was no longer any question of a disaster such as General de Castelnau's report had led me to fear. On the evening before, I had received his request to be given authority to blow up the railroad bridges if and when it became necessary; this authority I now refused, stating that the demolitions seemed unnecessary.

Thus reassured, for the moment, as to the fate of our army in Lorraine, and having decided not to undertake any important action in Upper Alsace, I could devote all my attention to the events taking place in Belgium, where all the interest of the manœuvre was now concentrated.

During the day, General de Morionville, Chief of Staff of King Albert, had come to see me. He described in rather pessimistic terms the situation of the Belgian Army, which up to the present had been obliged to support unaided the whole weight of the struggle. He then explained to me the reasons which had determined the retreat of the army to Antwerp, from which place it could still threaten the right flank of the enemy masses marching towards the west. I could not obtain from him anything but the vaguest information as to the strength of the German forces. I informed him regarding our intentions, and assured him that in a very short time vigorous action by all the Allies against the adversary would begin.

This visit confirmed the news which had been sent me from the Chief of the French Mission at Belgian G.H.Q., Lieutenant-Colonel Adelbert. This officer had received a letter from Lieutenant-General de Selliers, Chief of Staff of the Belgian Army, setting forth the advantages which had already accrued to the French Army through the assistance of the Belgian Army and the difficulties which surrounded the latter, caught in the midst of its reorganization and unsupported by either French or British forces. He attributed the decision to fall back on Antwerp to the

fact that the troops no longer had it in them to offer the resistance which would be needed if the fighting was renewed.

On the morning of the 21st I learned that cavalry units had passed through Brussels the previous afternoon, moving in the direction of Ninove and Hal, followed by two infantry divisions coming from Louvain. Further south, the enemy columns had resumed their march towards the west. The investment of Namur had begun on the left bank of the Meuse. During the afternoon it was reported from Lille that the German cavalry seemed to be not far from Roubaix, Tourcoing and Lille, and that great agitation reigned in those places.<sup>4</sup>

While the movement of the enemy's right wing had taken on an amplitude which we had not expected, the situation for the moment did not seem to me disquieting, for one of two things must happen: either the enemy's columns would continue their march towards the west and thus present their flank to the Fifth Army, assembled behind the Sambre and resting on Namur; or else they would move along the Sambre, where the Fifth Army would without doubt bring them to battle; this would last a sufficiently long time to enable the action of the Fourth Army to make itself felt north of the Semoy. My idea was that General Lanrezac would be more quickly informed than I, since he was on the spot and in liaison with the British, and that he could seize the best occasion that offered and efficiently carry out his mission.

Therefore, when, on the afternoon of the 21st, he pointed out to me that the advance of his army on the left bank of the Sambre as early as the 22nd might necessitate his troops delivering an isolated battle, and that in order to operate in liaison with the British it would be necessary to wait until the 23rd or perhaps the 24th, I answered that I left him the absolute judge as to the time when it seemed best to commence his offensive movement and that I would keep him informed each day regarding the line which had been reached by the Fourth Army.

Towards 8 p.m. information from Belgian G.H.Q. was received by us that the German army corps operating in the region of Brussels seemed that day to have made a conversion towards the south, after passing beyond the town; the IV Corps, in particular, which had debouched along the highway to Ninove, had turned towards Hal. On its right, the II Corps, after having marched from Vilvorde towards Alost had not reached the latter place at 8 p.m.

<sup>4</sup> The same day General d'Amade proposed to me to place the defence of Lille under the orders of General Hermant, commanding the artillery of Douai. I answered at 2 o'clock giving my approval to this suggestion.

It thus seemed that the German movement would bring about a battle, on the 22nd or the 23rd, with our forces facing north; in this case the Fifth Army and the British would find themselves side by side, and they would possess a numerical superiority. The strength of the enemy's forces constituting his right wing, including the troops masking Namur and those confronting the Belgians, was estimated at six army corps, three cavalry divisions and two or three reserve divisions. On our side, our Fifth Army was composed of ten and a half infantry divisions, three cavalry divisions and three reserve divisions,<sup>5</sup> while the British Army counted four and a half infantry divisions and one cavalry division.<sup>6</sup>

The day passed calmly for the Fifth Army except for an outpost engagement at the Tamines bridge. The bombardment of Namur began during the afternoon. The Third and Fourth Armies began their movements without meeting any resistance. The evening of the 21st I gave orders to the latter army to continue its movement towards the north, having as its mission to drive back to the Meuse, between Dinant, Namur and the Ourthe, whatever enemy forces were found in this region. I directed the Third Army, which continued to cover the right flank of the Fourth against enemy forces in Luxembourg, to so dispose its elements as to be able easily to come into action facing east.

As the day of August 21st ended, I had good hopes of success. The battle in Belgium seemed about to be engaged in a favourable strategic direction, and the latest news from the Second Army gave me reason to think that on this side nothing serious could happen before matters were settled in the north.

*Saturday, August 22nd.* The 22nd was for me a day of waiting; it was still too soon for any intervention on my part in the serious game which was being played in Belgium. The matter lay in the hands of subordinate commanders. On this part of the front my attention had become fixed upon Sordet's Cavalry Corps, which seemed to me to display little activity against the German cavalry reported north of Mons, and I began to ask myself whether General Sordet had the energy required for his work. Twice that day, at the beginning of the afternoon and again at about 10 p.m., I expressed my astonishment to General Lanrezac, under whose orders he was acting, and I asked his advice as to putting another officer in command of the Cavalry Corps. To protect the region of Lille-Tourcoing from repeated raids by the German cavalry, I directed Colonel

\* XVIII, III, X and I Army Corps; 37th and 38th Infantry Divisions; 8th Infantry Brigade; 4th Group of reserve divisions (51st, 53rd and 69th); the I Cavalry Corps (1st, 3rd, 5th Cavalry Divisions).

\* 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Infantry Divisions, one mixed brigade, one cavalry division.

Pellé to ask the Minister of War to place a fourth territorial division at the disposal of General d'Amade.<sup>7</sup>

On the front of the First and Second Armies the situation appeared to be calming down, and on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> I sent instructions specifying the new mission of these armies. This was, to observe a defensive attitude, holding fast for the time required for the development of the manœuvre begun in the north, and then be ready to resume the offensive. During the evening fresh information came in. First, in respect to the movement of the German extreme right, it appeared that its wide turning movement around Namur was continuing, as had been reported the day before by the Belgian Staff. This wing comprised five or six army corps, which appeared to be followed by reserve formations; it was covered on the west by three divisions of cavalry. Early in the afternoon the enemy had crossed the Sambre and attacked east of Charleroi. Our X and III Corps had suffered greatly and had been obliged to fall back; this retreat had induced that of the I Corps on their right, which had abandoned the bridges across the Meuse. The XVIII Corps had not been engaged.

The Third and Fourth Armies had met the enemy early in the morning. The Third, at the price of serious losses, had established itself on the front Joppécourt-Virton; the Fourth had been successfully engaged around Neufchâteau and at Maissin; but in the direction of Tintigny, and above all near Ochants, it had met with a repulse which brought about a general retreat to the front Meix-Devant-Vitron-Jamoinne-Bertrix-Paliseul-Houdremont. These two armies were to resume the offensive the next day, August 23<sup>rd</sup>.

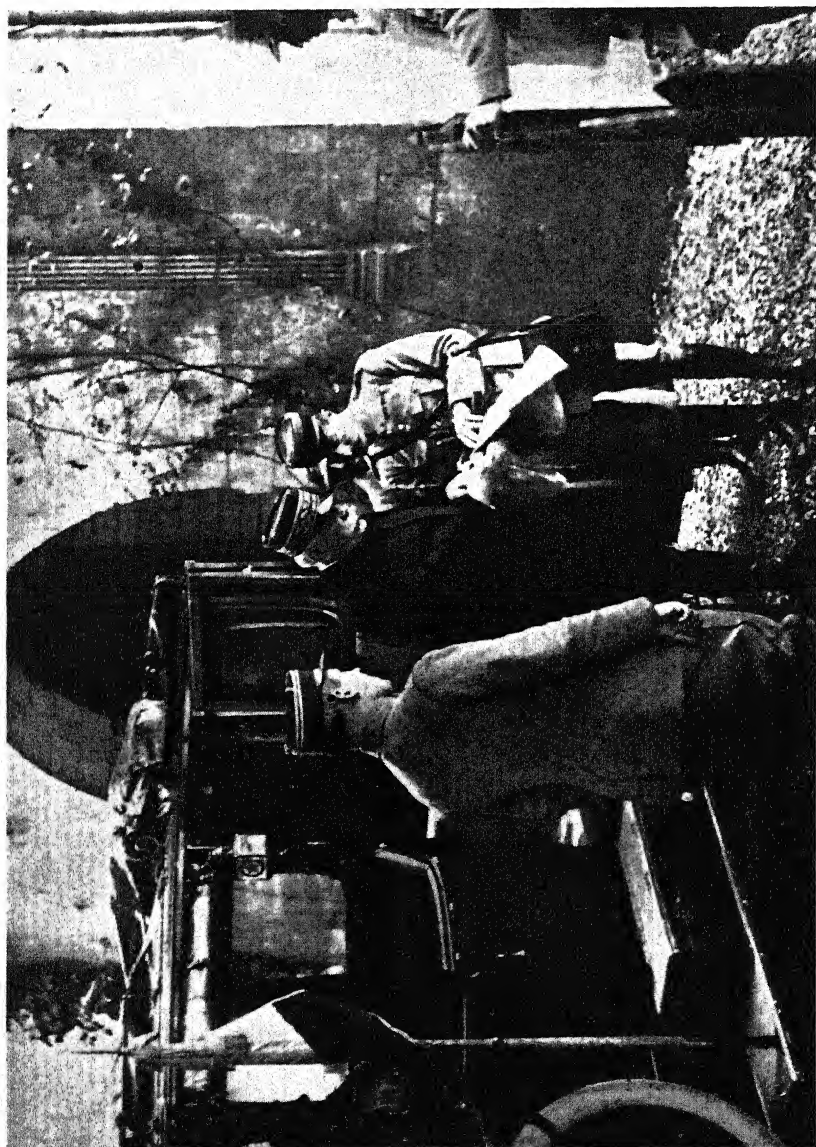
On the Lorraine front, in the region of the Grand Couronné, nothing but cavalry engagements had taken place. During the afternoon the rear-guards of the XVI, XV, and XX Corps had been attacked by forces which were endeavouring to cross the Sanon and which succeeded in entering Lunéville. The left of the First Army had been attacked during the morning and had fallen back towards the forest of Mondon and the Meurthe.

From the general trend of this information it would have been premature as yet to draw conclusions; it was necessary to wait a little longer before forming an opinion and taking decisions.

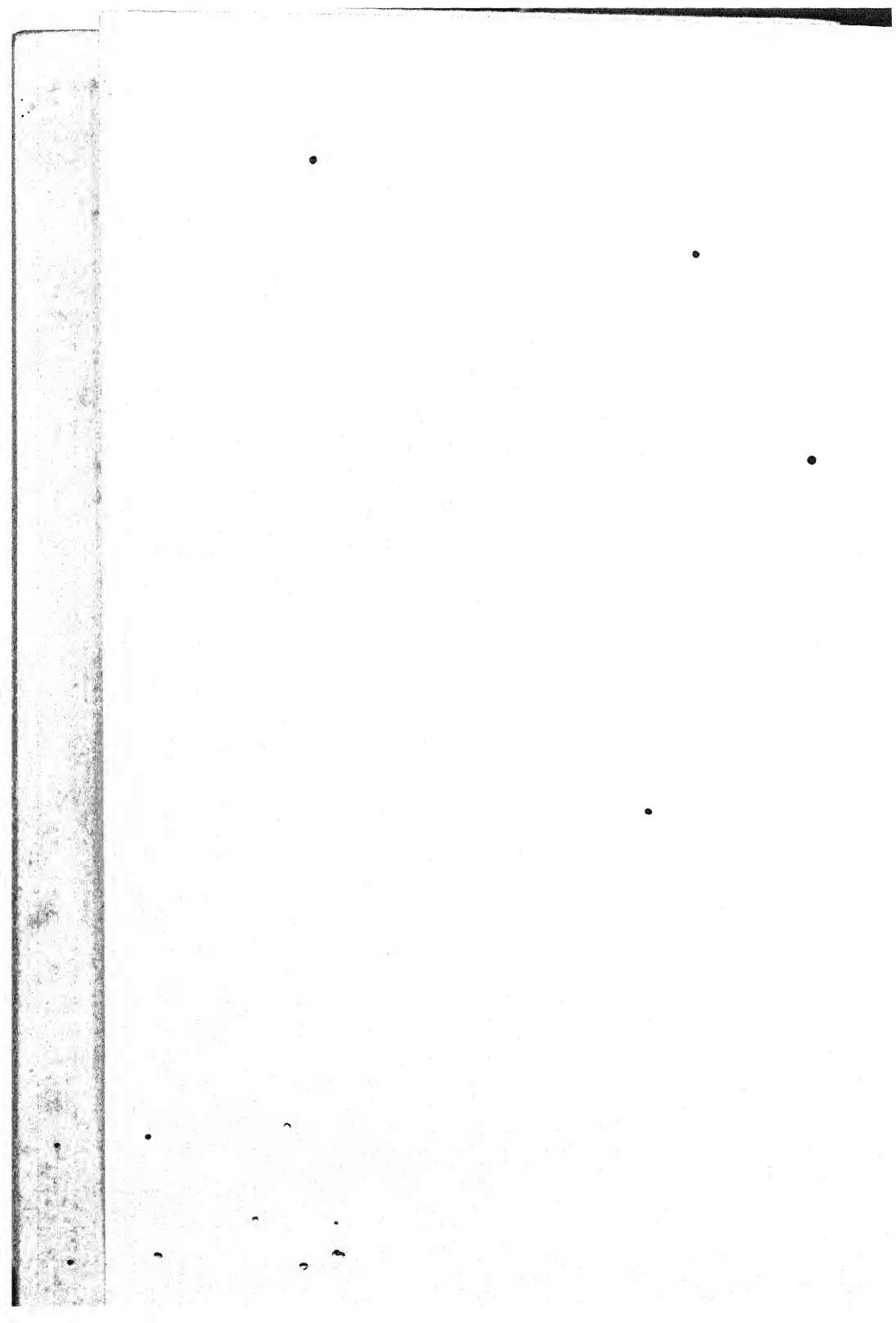
Towards the end of the afternoon of this day news arrived from

<sup>7</sup> I had known Pellé in Madagascar when he was a captain and I had learned there greatly to appreciate his remarkable qualities. In the early days of the war I asked the Minister to place Colonel Pellé, who was then in Morocco, under my orders. This request was approved and he joined me at the moment the battle of the frontiers opened.





ARRIVAL OF GENERAL JOFFRE AT A HEADQUARTERS.



Russia. I had urged that the Russians hasten their march in the direction of Berlin and Vienna, and M. Paléologue telegraphed me of the result of his representations. The Russian forces, he said, "were now formed into ten armies; of which seven were already engaged against Germany and Austria—a total of twenty-eight army corps, composed of about 1,120,000 men. The Grand Duke Nicholas had declared himself resolved to march as rapidly as possible against Berlin and Vienna, especially against Berlin, passing between the fortresses of Thorn, Posen, and Breslau. All of his armies had already taken the offensive. The Russian troops were now across the frontier of East Prussia and had penetrated some twenty miles into that province; the forces on the left bank of the Vistula were expected to march directly against Berlin as soon as the armies of the north-west had succeeded in pinning the German Army to its positions.

These telegrams gave me the right to conclude that the Germans would shortly find themselves seriously menaced on their eastern front and that I could hope to see them soon constrained to diminish the density of the forces engaged against us. However, from a source which appeared to me authentic, we learned that two active army corps, at first opposed to the Russian Army, were now being transported towards the French front and that they had been replaced in the East by landwehr formations. I asked the Government once more to urge upon the Russian General Staff the necessity of a most vigorous offensive towards Berlin.

The news of our repulse at Morhange had produced considerable emotion in Paris. On the 22nd M. Messimy wrote in that staccato style which he liked:

"My dear General and Friend,

The day before yesterday, a success; yesterday, a repulse. That is war. I have complete faith in the victory of tomorrow. But whatever happens be sure of my unalterable friendship.

MESSIMY."

Up to the present I had sent each day a telephonic report to the Minister of War regarding the events of the day before. During the evening of the 22nd, Captain Tardieu arrived bearing a letter from the Prime Minister, M. Viviani, who complained, although very discreetly, that he was not kept sufficiently informed. He represented the responsibility which rested upon the Government in the matter of taking measures to prepare public opinion progressively and in time; he also pointed out the need of counteracting German diplomacy which, by means of the press, endeavoured to mislead public opinion throughout the world. He suggested that two officers be appointed to work between

G.H.Q. and the Government. The business of these officers would be to bring information to Paris regarding operations as they took place and the manner in which our troops had conducted themselves, though without entering upon any analysis of the actions of formations smaller than a division. In closing M. Viviani took occasion to express his "confidence and the affectionate esteem of the Government and the whole population; they place their entire reliance upon the army, its chiefs, and yourself."

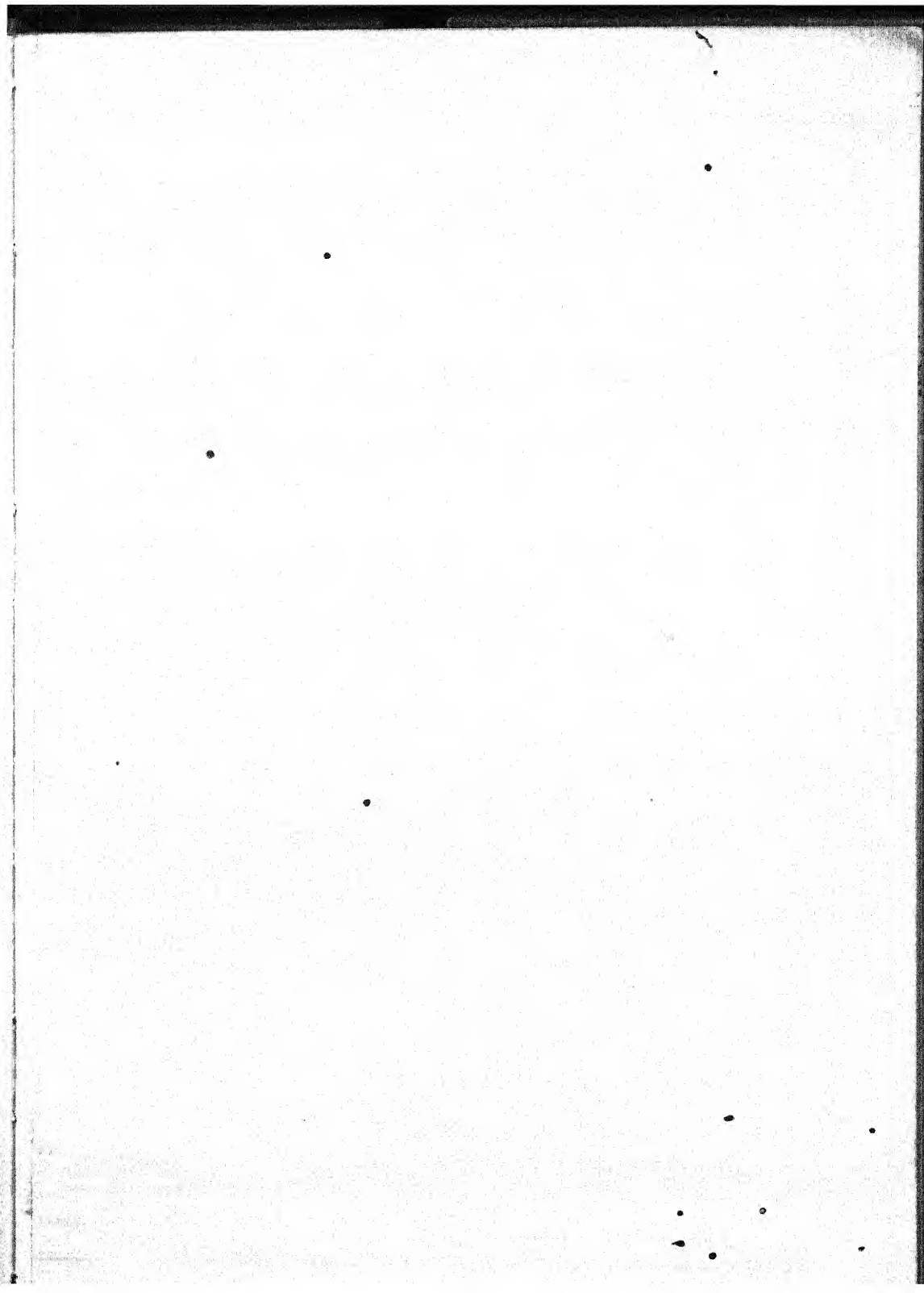
There was no reason for not accepting these entirely reasonable propositions, and it was in this way that the institution of liaison officers between the Government and G.H.Q. was started. I shall be led to speak of it frequently hereafter. The two officers who filled this delicate post during the whole time I was in command were Colonel Pénelon and Lieutenant-Colonel Herbillon; both of them gave proof of tact and devotion to duty.

*Sunday, August 23rd.* The hopes I nourished regarding the offensive which the Fourth Army had successfully started the day before and which was to be continued on the 23rd, did not last long. Early on the morning of the 23rd news came from General de Langle that the "disorderly" retreat of the XVII Corps on the left bank of the Semoy and the "disorganization" which had taken place in three brigades of the Colonial Corps, had brought about the retreat of the II and XII Corps. This imposed upon the commander of the Fourth Army the necessity of falling back to a position where he could re-form his disintegrated units. He expected to hold fast to this position throughout the day.

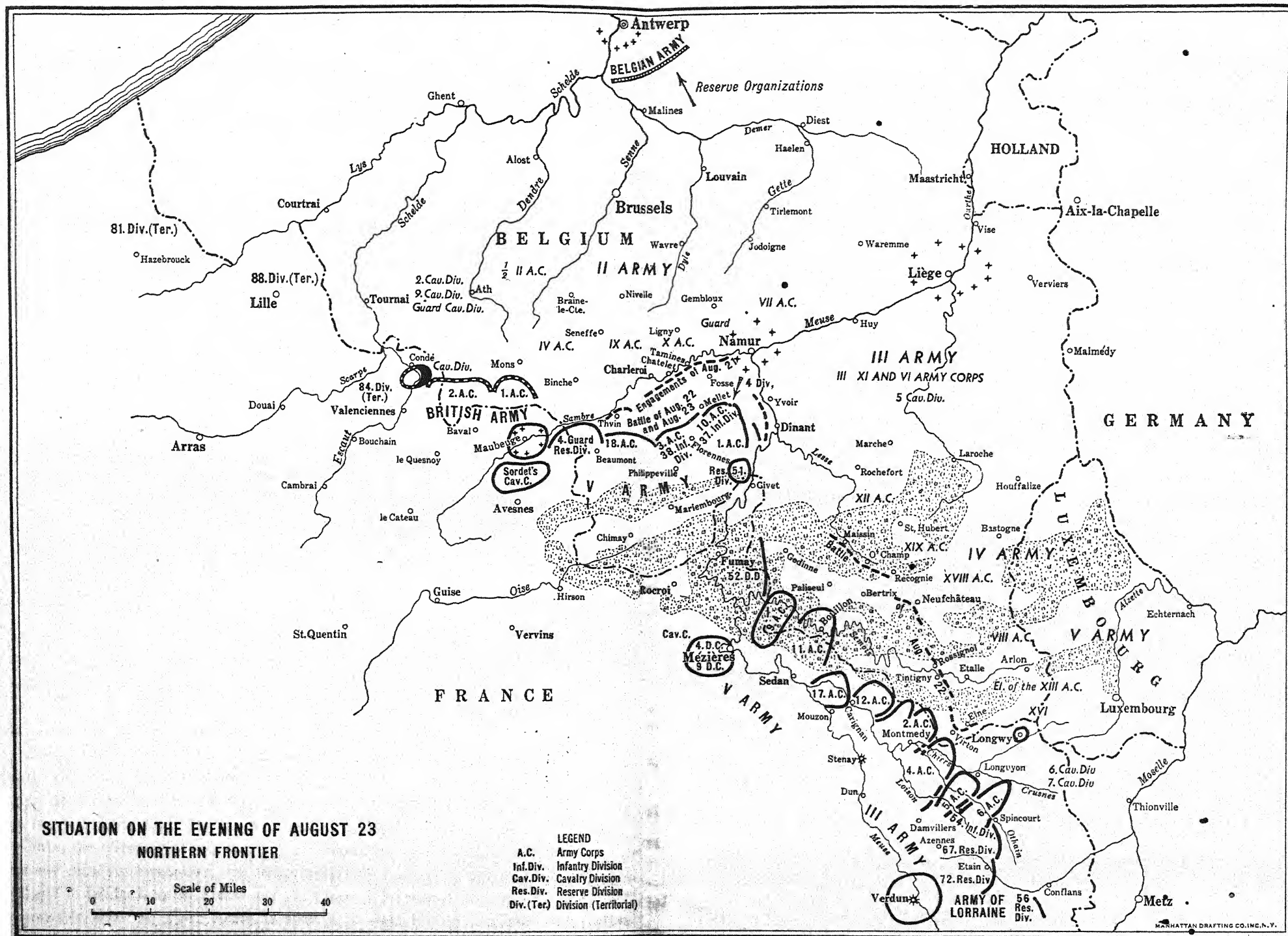
This report surprised me, for, according to all our information, there were only three or four enemy corps facing the army of General de Langle. The terms employed by this officer in describing the actions of some of his units also led me to think that there must have been grave shortcomings on the part of their commanders. It was imperative that prompt action be taken, and I asked General de Langle to report to me immediately the names of those officers who ought to be relieved from their command, or against whom I should institute disciplinary measures.

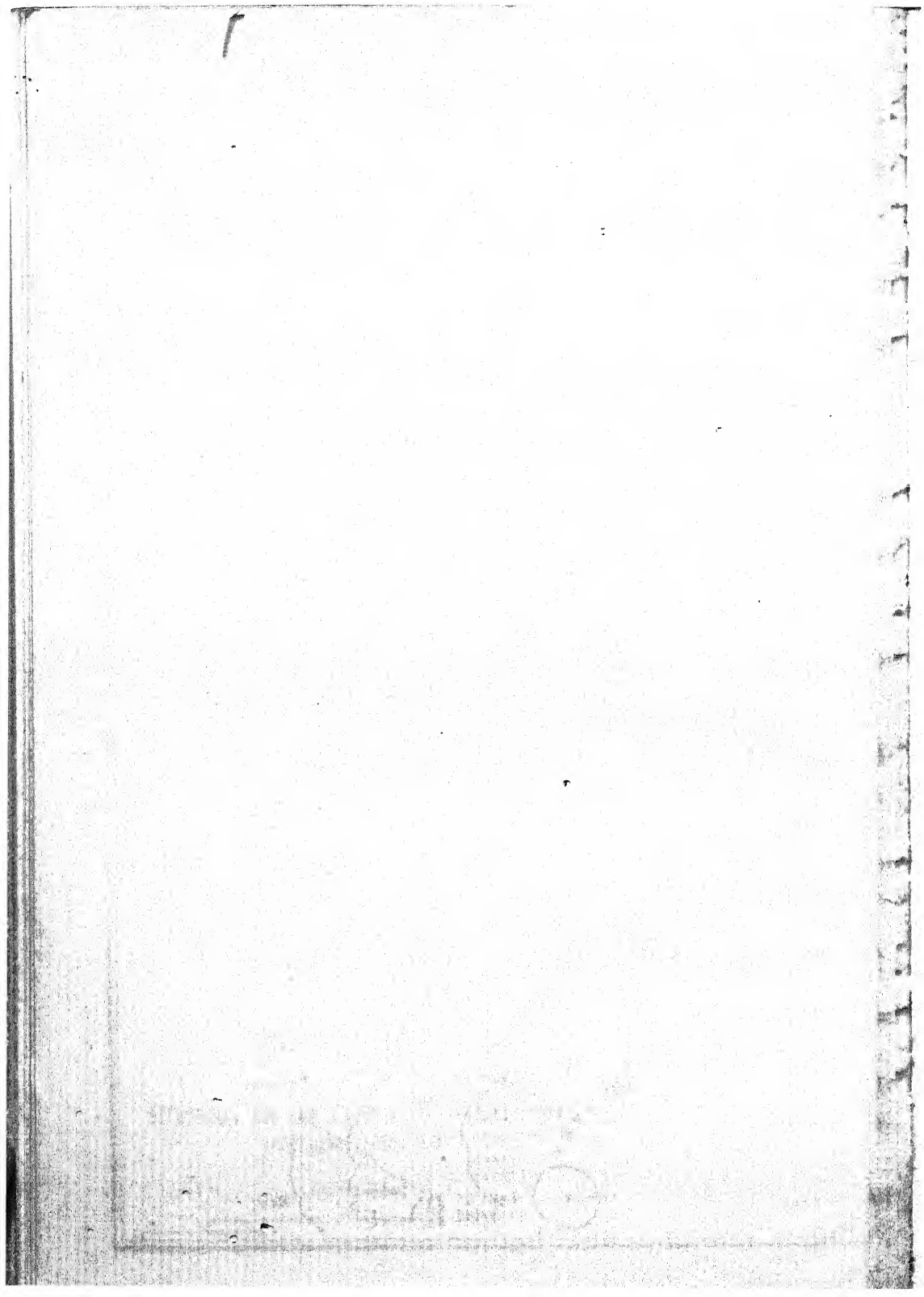
During the evening I learned that the Fourth Army had again met with serious repulses at several points along its front, especially on its right. Its retirement had not been effected without difficulty, especially on the part of the XII Corps and the Colonial Corps.

Thus, the offensive of this army, upon whose success I had counted for my principal manœuvre, was temporarily held up and its elements obliged to fall back to the Meuse and the Chiers. This was all the more regrettable, since the Third Army, in spite of its right having retreated









behind the Crusne and the Chiers, expected to resume the offensive the following day.

Let us see what was going on during this time in the Fifth Army and on the side of the British. During the whole day no news came in, but in the evening I received a telegram from Colonel Huguet giving me the situation of the British Army that morning. Its heads of column were at Haulchain, Jemmapes and Saint-Ghislain, the cavalry on the left, towards Quiévrain. Huguet informed me that General Lanrezac had asked Field Marshal French, in case the British Army itself was not attacked, to direct an attack on the flank of the enemy forces crossing the Sambre. But Sir John had decided to maintain for twenty-four hours the position he held on the morning of the twenty-third; if air reconnaissances showed that the German forces north and north-west of Mons were not too numerous, he would move forward, with his front facing towards the north-east, provided his left flank was not menaced.

Soon after this I received a report from Lanrezac, in answer to my request to inform me of his intentions. He said that his army had been attacked at 11 o'clock that morning, that three corps had fallen back to Valcourt, that the enemy was threatening his right on the Meuse and that a German detachment had succeeded in occupying Omhaye. Givet was menaced, Namur had fallen. In the presence of this situation, and upon learning of the repulse of the Fourth Army, Lanrezac had decided to withdraw his army the next day to the front Beaumont-Givet.

The general engagement had thus started with a series of repulses which endangered the execution of the plan I had conceived. I asked myself, was this check definitive or could I hope that, stimulated to a new effort, our armies could once more advance?

My first task was to seek the cause of these failures, in order to find a remedy.

Did they proceed from the enemy's numerical superiority? Here is the German order of battle, from north to south, as we estimated it on August 23rd:

On the Meuse	}	Second Army:	5 1/2 corps and 3 cavalry divisions
2 Armies		Third Army:	(apparently on the right bank) 3 corps and 1 cavalry division
In Belgian Luxembourg	}	Fourth Army:	3 corps and 1 cavalry division
In the Grand Duchy		Fifth Army:	2 corps and 2 or 3 cavalry divisions

In Lorraine	Sixth Army:	4 corps and 2 cavalry divisions
In Alsace	Seventh Army:	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; font-size: 4em; line-height: 1;">{</div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;">           Northern group: elements of 3            corps and 1 cavalry division            Southern group: reserve forma-            tions.         </div>

The only thing we knew regarding the German reserve formations was that reserve troops must have been pushed towards the entrenched camp of Antwerp. One of these had been identified on the 22nd west of Aerschot, but no other had been recognized following in the track of the armies that we had located.<sup>8</sup>

Facing these troops we had:

In Belgium	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; font-size: 4em; line-height: 1;">{</div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;">           The British Army: 4½ infantry divisions and 1 cavalry            division            Fifth Army: 10½ infantry divisions and 3 cavalry divi-            sions            In addition, 3 reserve infantry divisions         </div>
In Belgian Luxembourg	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; font-size: 4em; line-height: 1;">{</div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;">           Fourth Army: 12 infantry divisions, 2 cavalry divisions            and 2 reserve divisions            Third Army: 6 infantry divisions and 1 cavalry division         </div>
In Lorraine	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; font-size: 4em; line-height: 1;">{</div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;">           Second Army: 7 infantry divisions, 2 cavalry divisions            and 5 reserve divisions         </div>
In Alsace	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; font-size: 4em; line-height: 1;">{</div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;">           First Army: 9 infantry divisions and 1 cavalry division            Seventh Army: 2½ infantry divisions, 1 cavalry division            and 3 reserve divisions         </div>

It thus appeared that in as regards effectives we had an appreciable superiority over the enemy.

Did the trouble lie in the strategic disposition of our forces? It must be remembered that the extreme left flank of the Allied line was held by the British, west of Mons. The latest information available on the evening of July 23rd indicated that the turning movement being executed by the German corps north of Namur had brought them that afternoon to the following line:

- II Army Corps, towards Ath
- IV " south of Enghien
- IX " south of the zone Soignies-Seneffe

<sup>8</sup> The order of battle given above was drawn up by the Intelligence Bureau of G.H.Q. on August 23, 1914, and transmitted to the various armies at 6 p.m., as an annex to the intelligence report of that day.

VII Army Corps, south of the bridge at Celles

X Corps and Guard Corps, in front of the right of our Fifth Army.

This movement of the German right was covered in the region of Leuze by the 9th Cavalry Division, supported by detachments of all arms. It did not seem, therefore, that our left was in danger of being surrounded, for the opposing fronts appeared exactly to coincide. Hence my reflections led me to conclude that the fall of Namur and the menace against the right flank of our Fifth Army along the Meuse, taken in conjunction with probable inefficiency and lack of energy on the part of local commanders, were the factors which had brought about the retreat of Lanrezac's army. What I feared was that this retreat might result in a similar movement on the part of the British Army.

*Monday, August 24th.* On the morning of the 24th I received two telegrams. The first dated 3.45 a.m. came from the British Army and announced that our Allies were about to fall back to the line Maubeuge-Valenciennes. The second, from the Fifth Army, stated that the fighting had been renewed with violence during the day of the 23rd, especially along the front of the XVIII, III, and I Army Corps. "The English," added General Lanrezac, "inform me that they are falling back to the line Longueville-Valenciennes, and that if their left flank becomes menaced, they will retire upon Amiens. Please inform me of the subsequent direction of retreat."

Shortly afterwards I received the report of Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard, whom I had sent to see General Lanrezac. He had found him the evening of the 23rd anxious but not discouraged. He had explained the causes which, in his opinion, had led to the repulse of his army, and these he requested Colonel Brécard to communicate to me.

This was not the only news of the kind that I was to receive that morning. Towards 8.30 a.m. de Langle sent word that his offensive towards the north had been "temporarily" stopped and that he considered it necessary to retire his army behind the Meuse and the Chiers; there he hoped it could defend itself, fill up its ranks, re-organize and get ready once more to pass to the offensive. I knew de Langle and I was confident in the firmness of his character. If he reported such a condition of affairs I realized that it was an exact statement of the facts. But this retreat of the Fourth Army left the German troops signalled in the region of the Lesse and at Ciney, free to cross the Meuse.

There was no escaping the evidence of these facts, as I wrote to the Minister of War on the morning of the 24th: our general offensive in

Belgium was definitely checked. We were condemned to a defensive attitude resting upon our fortified places and the principal obstacles presented by the terrain. Here we must hold out as long as possible, at the same time trying to wear down the enemy; we would then take the offensive as soon as a good occasion offered.<sup>9</sup>

If the first manœuvre as conceived had failed, there was nothing to do but prepare another. In spite of the painful necessity it involved of abandoning a part of our territory, it was requisite to yield ground at first, in order to give the time and space needed for reconstituting a mass capable of resuming the offensive.

Between 8.30 and 9.30 in the morning I sent out the order for preparing this new operation:

The Fifth Army, keeping in touch with the Fourth and with the British, was to manœuvre in retreat, taking as points of support the fortifications of Maubeuge and the wooded heights of the Ardennes.

The Fourth Army was to post itself on the left bank of the Meuse below Moupon and on the heights of the right bank of that river between Mouzon and Stenay.

The Third Army was to take up positions organized along the general front Montmédy-Damvillers-Azannes, keeping in touch with the Army of Lorraine, which would continue to hold the Hauts-de-Meuse, maintaining there a defensive attitude.

The Second Army was a source of no anxiety for the present; the whole day of the 23rd had passed without any serious fighting, the movements prescribed had been effected, and, during the morning, General de Castelnau informed me that if the Germans attempted to invest the southern side of the Grand Couronné he intended to attack them in the course of the afternoon.

The First Army also seemed to be in good posture. The XXI Corps had been attacked the previous day and had easily defended its positions; the VIII Corps and the XIII Corps had established themselves on ground enabling them to give firm support to the front of this army.

The Army of Alsace had facing it nothing but reserve and landwehr formations, and I considered that the situation on our left wing was such as to justify me in withdrawing from this army the greater part of the VII Corps.<sup>10</sup>

What preoccupied me the most was the encircling movement which

<sup>9</sup> To this note of the 24th, informing the Minister of my intention to stand fast and wait for a favourable moment to resume the offensive, he answered laconically the same day 12.30 p.m. "Agreed. Hold out."

<sup>10</sup> One of its divisions and the corps staff.



the Germans appeared to be developing on our left. Now, it was the British alone who could offset this menace, and yet it was precisely this army to which I had no right to give orders. I had to content myself with suggesting to Sir John French that it would be most useful if he could delay the march of the enemy forces between Valenciennes and Maubeuge, in other words, along the prolongation of the line Givet-Beaumont where I hoped to see the Fifth Army make its stand. At the same time I indicated to him that if the presence of superior forces should oblige him to fall back, he might do so in the general direction of Cambrai. In this way he would join up with the barrier constituted by the three territorial divisions commanded by General d'Amade.<sup>11</sup>

It seemed to me necessary above all to place on the left of the British Army French troops to which I had the right to give orders; and as two reserve divisions coming from Paris were to arrive that night at Arras to join General d'Amade's force, I prescribed for them, as a general mission, the covering of the left flank of the British against any attempt at envelopment.

I also took under my personal direction Sordet's Cavalry Corps, which, instead of marching to the outside flank of the Allied armies had posted itself south of Maubeuge. I directed Sordet to pass to the left of the British and to aid in protecting their flank. But I already knew that nothing much could be expected from this corps, by reason of the extreme fatigue of both men and horses.

Having given these orders, which lay in the domain of strategy, I proceeded to examine why, in spite of the numerical superiority which I thought I had secured for our armies, the powerful offensive action attempted from Longwy to the Sambre had so completely failed from a tactical point of view.

However painful it may be to reveal certain weaknesses, it is essential to state things here exactly as they appeared to me at the time. When the test came, a large number of our generals had shown that they were not equal to their task. Amongst them were some who in time of peace had enjoyed the most brilliant reputation as professors; there were others who, during map exercises, had displayed a fine comprehension of manœuvre; but now, in the presence of the enemy, these men appeared to be overwhelmed by the burden of their responsibility. In some of the larger units there had been a complete abdication of

<sup>11</sup> This barrier had been in place since the 22nd. It comprised an advanced line between Maubeuge and Dunkirk and a line of main resistance between Landreies and the Aa.

command. During one whole phase of the battle of Charleroi, all the orders in the III Corps were given by General Rouquerol, commanding the corps artillery, who was obliged to step into the place of the corps commander, since this officer could not be found during the most critical moment of the day. In the XIV Corps as well as in the V Corps there was the same notorious incapacity. In this last-named corps a particularly unfortunate occurrence took place. The general commanding one of the divisions, completely losing control of himself and abandoning all sense of duty towards his men, committed suicide. General de Langle considered that a large part of the responsibility for the repulse which the Fourth Army had met with was due to the manner in which the XVII Corps had been handled during the battle.

There was no doubt that if I did not wish to see the failure of our first manœuvre transformed into an irremediable defeat, not a moment must be lost in weeding out the higher commanders, as it had been my intention to do during the course of the year 1914, had the war not come upon us. I demanded, therefore, that I be immediately furnished with the names of all general officers who had shown incapacity; as these reports came in, I verified them, and in cases which seemed to call for this solution, I sent back to Paris the officers concerned, placing them at the disposal of the War Ministry, and appointed in their stead other men who offered better promise of capacity.

Upon receiving my report of the first of these decisions, M. Messimy answered as follows:

PARIS, 24/8/14

My dear General,

You have sent back to me Generals B and G. Placing these men at my disposal is not enough when there has been cowardice, as in the case of General G.

I request that hereafter you send officers relieved of their command to G.H.Q. by motor-car and there have them court-martialled. I consider that, as in 1793, there are only two punishments, dismissal and death.

You want to win; to do so, use the most rapid, brutal, energetic and decisive methods. In any case, do not send back to the interior of the country men who will spit out their venom against you and against me; put them under lock and key while they are waiting to be tried.

If necessary, I will appoint General Gallieni president of a permanent general court-martial, which should sit not in Paris but at the front.

Yours,

MESSIMY.

The terms of this letter show that the Minister of War was even more categorical than I was. The general court-martial of which he talked

did not seem to me necessary. I considered that the normal processes of military tribunals which were at my disposal sufficed for those cases which fell under the Army Regulations; for any others, I adhered to my decision to send back to the interior general officers who showed themselves unfit to command.

But the incapacity displayed in a certain number of units was evidently not alone responsible for our reverses. It was apparent that the principles of the offensive which we had tried to inculcate in the army before the war had often been poorly understood and badly applied. From all points of the front came reports of mistakes made in handling troops, mistakes which had brought about heavy losses and sometimes reduced to nought the offensive and defensive qualities of the men. I was told that advanced guards, through a false comprehension of the offensive spirit, were nearly always sent into action without artillery support and occasionally got caught in close formation under the enemy's artillery fire. Sometimes it would be one of the larger units which, moving forward with its flanks unguarded, would suddenly become exposed to unexpected and costly fire. The infantry was almost always launched to the assault when at too great a distance from its objective. Conquered ground was never organized before starting off to the attack of a new position; in this way, if the latter failed, the troops were driven back without even reaping the fruits of their first effort. Far and beyond all, the co-operation of the infantry and the artillery was constantly neglected.

As soon as these facts came to my notice, I gave orders that every attack must be conducted with appropriate prudence, and, above all, liaison between the different arms must be ensured. These were precisely some of the points in our doctrine of the offensive that I had proposed to have studied and perfected in our camps of instruction, and which now had to be learnt in the hard school of battle. Unfortunately, more than a mere written order was needed to change instantly the mentality of an army; it takes a long time for a new idea fully to penetrate such a mass. However, the practical experience of war enables a commander rapidly to reduce this delay.

Since M. Viviani had requested it, in making my report to the Government announcing the definite failure of our general offensive in Belgium, I thought it my duty to indicate to him its causes. "Our army corps," I told him, "have not shown in the field that aptitude for the offensive which our partial successes at the start gave us reason to hope for, these successes having been obtained more especially in mountain

operations." This sentence again brought forth a quick reaction on the part of the Minister of War. Here is the telegram that he sent in reply:

"I have your report concerning those guilty of weaknesses. For such conduct there is only one punishment: immediate sentence to death. The first to be reached should be the guilty officers, if such there be. The only law in France today is win or die. I repeat my formal request, that you place in the highest positions only men who are young, energetic, and decided to win at any price: eliminate the old fossils without pity.

MESSIMY"

If, at this distance, one is tempted to believe that the Minister of War exaggerated the severity of the punishment to be meted out, I insist upon expressing my gratitude for the feeling he always left with me, namely, that I would be stoutly supported in every measure I took to infuse into our army the vigour which the situation demanded.

The day of Monday, August 24th, was relatively calm, and I was anxiously waiting for news to come in from our left wing. During the evening and the night it did not fail to arrive, and bad enough it was. Tournai and Condé had been occupied by enemy detachments, and later on General d'Amade informed me that the Germans had reached Somain and Valenciennes. The German right thus clearly out-flanked the British left, and would probably be free to develop a manœuvre that would menace our lines of communication. This was all the more likely now that the retreat of our Third and Fourth Armies undoubtedly would permit the Germans to strengthen the forces on their right wing.

The danger was serious. We had to face the probability of a retreat by our whole left wing, and especially by that part of it represented by the British Army. In view of this eventuality, I considered it necessary to arrange for the zones of retreat, so that when the time should arrive orders could be rapidly issued. The line to be followed by the British Army was to be towards the south-west, in order to cover the direction of Paris and also to avoid envelopment, as far as possible, by forcing the enemy to extend his flank farther towards the west. The limit of the British zone in the direction of the Fifth Army was fixed by the line passing through Maubeuge, Le Cateau and Bohain.

The envelopment of the British Army not only endangered our line of communications but it threatened the whole region of the north, defended as this was by only the territorial divisions of General d'Amade. It was high time to start the inundations and to withdraw our supply depots from the vicinity of the frontier. Towards 3.30 p.m. the Minister of War and I came to an understanding on this subject by telephone.

With regard to Lille, I had thought that the place would be able to offer some resistance, as, it will be remembered, I had authorized its being placed in a state of defence. My hope was of short duration; towards 5 o'clock, General d'Amade telephoned to G.H.Q. that he had received orders directly from the Minister of War not to defend Lille. This decision surprised me, being so wholly different from what had been agreed upon on the 23rd. Towards 11 p.m. M. Messimy confirmed to me this decision, which the Government had taken at the request of the civil population of the town.

News coming in from the rest of the front was less bad. The Fifth Army had found no difficulty in occupying the line Mariembourg—Solre-le-Château—Maubeuge, and the enemy had not pressed the pursuit. Reports from the Third and Fourth Armies gave me renewed hope. The Second Army had observed at least two enemy corps moving in the direction of Clayeures and Gerbéviller; the XX Corps and the 70th Reserve Division had counter-attacked them, and the first news of this operation was favourable (report telephoned at 7.40 p.m.).

Thus, at the end of the day, the whole danger seemed concentrated in front of the British Army, and it appeared all the more menacing since, for the first time, reports were now arriving showing that the army corps composing the German Second Army were each followed by reserve formations bearing the same numbers as the active corps. It was the first indication we had that German reserve units were being employed in active operations. This information furnished the explanation of the extraordinary extension which the enemy had given to his front.

In the midst of these dark days my thoughts frequently turned towards our Russian allies, and I continued to believe that their action would soon diminish the pressure which the enemy was now directing against us. This explains the impatience with which I awaited news from the Eastern front. It arrived that same day. The Russian Ambassador had been requested by the Chief of Staff of the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army to inform me that "the Russian offensive in Germany is being made by large masses and is being accomplished with all the rapidity compatible with the requirements of safety. In East Prussia grave strategic problems are being decided, and as soon as a solution can be obtained it will become possible to proceed with a more rapid development of further offensive operations. In general," this telegram concluded, "the Russian offensive is being inflexibly pursued."

All of this was very vague.





## CHAPTER IV

### THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

*Preparations for the battle: August 25th/September 5th*

ON THE morning of August 25th it was manifest that the strategic manœuvre which had been in preparation since the 18th ended in a complete failure.

The news arriving during the night no longer left any hope. The forward movement of the German armies in Belgium continued. The British Army, attacked during the 24th by large forces, had fallen back to the line Valenciennes-Maubeuge, and there was every reason to fear that the enemy would be successful in the enveloping manœuvre which he would certainly undertake against that army. In front of their right wing, the Germans had already occupied Somain, and their reserve army corps, up to this time reported as moving against Antwerp, now seemed to be following in the tracks of the marching flank, thus increasing the enemy resources for a manœuvre in this direction.<sup>1</sup>

Believing as I still did that the Germans were engaging only active army corps in their offensive operations, I was led to ask myself whether our failure should be attributed solely to mistakes of a tactical nature, such as I have referred to in the preceding chapter; was it not likewise due to the numerical superiority which the enemy had succeeded in giving to his right wing? Our previous calculation had been far from leading us to suspect that he could attain this superiority, and it seemed to me that it must be attributed to the repulse which our principal offensive operation had encountered at the very outset. Our Fourth Army, with its six powerful corps, had been suddenly immobilized, and it now announced that, while it could hold on between the Meuse and the Chiers, the losses it had sustained rendered any new offensive effort impossible for a long time. It was my idea that the repulse of the Fourth Army in Belgian Luxembourg had enabled the enemy to take a part of the forces which were operating in this region, send them

<sup>1</sup> Report No. 59; Intelligence Bureau of G.H.Q., August 25, 1914, 6 a.m.



across the Meuse below Givet, and engage them against the right of our Fifth Army.

I must confess that at this moment my greatest source of anxiety lay in what might be the attitude of our rank and file. We had started out with a series of failures, and the French soldier is very impressionable—losing confidence as readily as he acquires enthusiasm, yielding to depression as quickly as he becomes exalted. The question I asked myself was, would he be able to hold out under this terrible strain, aggravated as it was by the fierce heat which marked the closing days of August? Indications of exhaustion and depression had come to my notice, and they greatly disturbed me. In many places the ditches by the side of the road were littered with knapsacks which the men had thrown away, and it seemed that company officers and non-commissioned officers, not yet fully accustomed to the exercise of their authority, had failed to act with sufficient vigour.

After this glance at my preoccupations as to the morale of the army, I must now return to those which lay in the domain of strategy; for I felt that not an hour must be lost in preparing a manœuvre which would block the movement now menacing our left, a movement which pointed straight down the Valley of the Oise towards Paris.

In the first place, could I hope that our left would hold fast where it stood and thus give me time to prepare a new manœuvre? The answer was, No; the power of resistance of our men and that of the British had been too seriously weakened to permit any illusion on that point; however painful the necessity might be, further ground would have to be ceded in order to give the Allied troops a chance to recuperate.

This point being settled, the next question was, what manœuvre should we undertake? During the whole of that long and gloomy day of August 25th, I studied with my collaborators the various possibilities which offered themselves. Berthelot considered that the movement begun in Belgian Luxembourg might be resumed on other ground. He anticipated that the British Army, under the enveloping action of the German right, would inevitably fall back in haste, thus accentuating the danger to our Fifth Army of being out-flanked on its left. He believed that it would be opportune to take advantage of this situation and direct an offensive against the inner wing of the German right opposed to the British. In support of this idea, he pointed out that his solution could be rapidly executed and that it might produce very great results through separating the enemy right from the main body of his forces engaged in the battle.

This conception of General Berthelot did not satisfy me. Before considering it, we would first have to be assured that the Fifth Army could hold out long enough to permit me to assemble behind its front the mass charged with piercing the enemy's line; again, if through lack of time, or for any other reason, this manœuvre should fail, we would run the risk of seeing our armies irremediably enveloped by the enemy and forced to deliver a calamitous battle facing their rear.

In spite of the objections which I offered, Berthelot maintained his point of view. My own preference inclined more and more towards a wholly different solution, which consisted in creating on the outer wing of the enemy a mass capable, in its turn, of enveloping his marching flank.

After having conscientiously weighed the advantages and the chances of success of the two conceptions, I decided, on the evening of August 25th, upon the second solution, and I directed Major Gamelin to have the order drawn up which later became General Instructions No. 2. I signed it and sent it to General Berthelot with the request that he cause it to be executed. I ought to add here that, my decision once taken, Berthelot, putting aside his own preferences, applied himself with the utmost energy to ensuring by every possible means the success of this new plan.

If we were to have time to assemble in the region of Amiens a force large enough to produce a decisive effect against the marching flank of the enemy, it was necessary to accept a further retreat of our armies on the left. But we had reason to hope that by making good use of every obstacle by which the enemy's advance might be retarded, and by delivering frequent counter-attacks, these armies need not fall back farther than the general line of the Aisne, prolonged by the bluffs running from Craonne to Laon and La Fère. The Third Army would rest on the fortifications of Verdun, which would thus serve as a pivot for the general movement in retreat. The French Fourth and Fifth Armies, the British Army and the Amiens group, constituted with forces taken from our right wing, would furnish a mass capable of resuming the offensive at the moment the enemy, debouching from the wooded regions of the Ardennes, would have to fight with this difficult ground lying behind him.

My conception was a battle stretching from Amiens to Rheims with the new army placed on the extreme left of our line, outside of the British and in a position to outflank the German right.

If this manœuvre was to succeed two essential conditions had to be fulfilled:

In the first place, our Fourth and Fifth Armies, interrupting their retreat with partial offensives and counter-attacks, well supported by artillery (most efficacious against troops on the march), must give me the time required for assembling on our left the mass which I had decided to form.

In the second place, the British would have to resist tenaciously and yield ground only very slowly, so that our left would not be obliged to fall back so fast as to facilitate the enemy's attempt at envelopment. To support them, there was the d'Amade group, to which were now being added the 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions, in course of detraining at Arras. The obligation I was under of convincing the British commander of the necessity of this action seemed to me so urgent that, on the evening of the 25th, I arranged for an interview with Sir John French, to take place the next morning at his headquarters at Saint-Quentin. I summoned to this meeting General Lanrezac, with whom it was important to make arrangements in the presence of the British Commander-in-Chief.

In order to form the Amiens group on our extreme left, I had to take army corps and divisions from the entire front. My determination to halt the operations of the Army of Alsace, which had now become secondary, made it possible to withdraw a portion of the VII Corps from this army; while the dissolution of General Archinard's 1st Group of reserve divisions would liberate the 63rd Division and make it available for sending to Picardy. As to the First and Second Armies, they were now engaged in a co-ordinated action, and the latest news on the evening of the 25th indicated that it was succeeding; consequently, there could be no question of reducing their strength for the time being.

There remained the Eighth Army, the Army of Lorraine, commanded by Maunoury. I had informed him the day before that the situation made it necessary for him to content himself with defending the Hauts-de-Meuse north of Verdun and to the south as far as Toul. Maunoury had replied that he considered it quite possible to do so if he was authorized to employ a part of his reserve divisions to support the attack which the Third Army was starting against German forces then marching upon Verdun through Conflans and Jeandelize. A captured German order had furnished information concerning this move.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Telephonic conversation between General Maunoury and General Bélin, August 24th, 10.30 a.m.

During the evening all that I learnt was that towards the end of the day the attack of the Third Army was making progress and that at 2 o'clock the Army of Lorraine had counter-attacked in conjunction with the VI Corps.<sup>3</sup> However advantageous this operation might be, it could only have a secondary importance; no serious results could be expected from it. Indeed, according to the captured German order, it was against only one enemy corps, flanked by an infantry division and a cavalry division, that our action had been directed. In view of the necessity of reinforcing as quickly as possible our troops in the north, a choice had to be made; we could not attack everywhere. Therefore, a defensive attitude on the Hauts-de-Meuse would have to suffice, and I decided to direct the Army of Lorraine to prepare to move two of its divisions by railway. On the morning of the 25th I sent Major Bel, liaison officer with the Third Army, to the headquarters of that army, bearing instructions to that army and to the Army of Lorraine to arrest the fighting, fall back to the Hauts-de-Meuse and establish themselves there on the defensive. At noon of the 25th Bel informed me that two complete divisions had been directed on Dugny and Saint-Mihiel. The same evening Maunoury reported that he had broken off the fighting, combining his movement with the retreat ordered for the Third Army.

I thus contemplated at this moment that the mass of manœuvre on our extreme left would consist of the VII Army Corps and one division coming from Alsace, two divisions taken from the entrenched camp of Paris, and two divisions withdrawn from the Army of Lorraine. A request to have these last two units transported had been sent to the Minister of War on August 23rd; on the 24th, the Army of Alsace had received orders to entrain, on the 25th, at Belfort and Montbéliard, the staff of the VII Corps and one division of this corps; on the 25th, orders were sent it to entrain the 63rd Reserve Division. On the morning of the 25th the Army of Lorraine knew that it must furnish me two reserve divisions, and at 11.25 a.m. on the 26th it was informed that the move of these divisions to Compiègne must commence on the 27th.

It was in this way that I created the group which later on was to become the Sixth Army.

On August 25th, about 9 p.m., I received from the Minister of War the following order: "If victory does not crown our efforts and if our armies are forced to retreat, an army composed of at least three active corps must be directed upon the entrenched camp of Paris, in order to assure

<sup>3</sup> Report from the Third Army, August 24th, 8.30 p.m.

the protection of the Capital. Acknowledgment will be made of the receipt of this order."

The reading of this telegram caused me intense surprise, for I saw here taking shape the menace of governmental interference in the conduct of operations—an interference which, if the eventualities envisaged were realized, bid fair considerably to hamper my liberty of action at the very moment when it was most essential that it should be entire and complete.

Moreover, the idea of shutting up three active army corps in the defences of Paris at a moment when we had need of all our resources in the field, appeared to me a serious danger. It will also be remarked that there was no actual connection between the idea of constituting an army of manœuvre in the region of Amiens, which was my thought, and that of sending three active corps to defend the entrenched camp of Paris, which was what the Minister's decision amounted to.

Fortunately, his order contained within itself its own corrective, to the extent, at least, that its execution was conditional and not imperative; for it opened with these words: "If victory does not crown our efforts and if our armies are forced to retreat." As I have just explained, I was at that moment organizing a manœuvre which to my mind should bring about a battle along the front roughly indicated by Amiens, Laon, the heights running north of the Aisne and Rheims. Therefore, the very terms of the Minister's order seemed to authorize me to await the outcome of that battle before executing it.

For this reason I considered that I had a right temporarily to suspend the execution of these instructions, reserving to myself the possibility of taking action in due time, as circumstances should require. Moreover, while the situation was disturbing, it did not seem to me as yet to be so serious as to make it necessary to provide immediately for the defence of the Capital; in any case, if it came to that, I would always have time to execute the Government's decision.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The orders from the Minister of War were accompanied by a letter in two parts, the first dated 7 a.m., the second noon; it was as follows:

Office of the Minister of War

No. 19 min.

Paris, 25 8 1914 7 a.m.

My dear General and Friend,

1. I am surprised, and indeed I am very much displeased, with the work done by Sordet. The German Cavalry Corps is marching over northern France, ravaging everything and knocking the territorials around at pleasure. Sordet is asleep instead of fighting. This is inadmissible.

If you want motor-cars for the use of the infantry there are a large number available in Paris. Provided you can furnish the petrol, at least sixty capable of transporting 500 men



*August 26th.* Early on the morning of the 26th I left for Saint-Quentin, accompanied by Berthelot and my A. D. C., Captain Muller. I attached the greatest importance to the interview I was about to have with the commander of the British Army, the first since the day he had come to see me at Vitry, at the moment he assumed command. The object I had in view was to make arrangements with him for the new plan of operations which I had decided upon and which would bring about a battle along the line Verdun-Laon-Amiens. I realized the difficulties that lay ahead of me; indeed, I had reason to fear that the Field Marshal was not entirely free to make a decision, for I knew that Kitchener had frequently tried to interfere in the direction of the British Army's opera-

could be immediately made available for operations with the cavalry. But this is only a minor question.

2. It seems evident that the northern theatre is going to assume great importance—a strategic importance affecting the general operations, a moral importance due to its proximity to Paris. We must create an army to fight there. In my opinion, this is necessary, in view of the small fighting value of the territorials, who put up no resistance.

3. I accept the principle involved in your plan of promotions. But in no case will I permit this decree to be used for advancing men serving on the staff. A captain is just as good as a colonel at any headquarters. I warn you that I will not approve nominations made in favour of staff personnel, unless under most exceptional circumstances. The procedure may be revolutionary, but I shall follow it in order to strengthen the hands of officers serving in command of troops.

4. Herewith is an order whose great importance will not escape you. It requires that a minimum garrison of three active corps in good condition be assigned to Paris in case we are repulsed. It goes without saying that the line of retreat of the rest of the army should be in another direction—the centre and south of France. We have fully decided to fight on mercilessly and to the bitter end.

Yours affectionately,

MESSIMY.

August 25, 1914. Noon.

My dear General,

5. The incursion of the German Cavalry Corps on our left has produced so violent an impression that I am keeping at my disposal the 3rd Algerian Division, now being mobilized at Perpignan and Carcassonne. If necessary, it can be transported in 48 hours to Chantilly or Beauvais. The out-flanking of our left is a fact whose strategic importance must not be exaggerated, but its effect upon public opinion has taken on proportions which you can hardly imagine.

Sordet's inaction appears to me more and more culpable. I consider that he has been guilty of grave neglect of duty. However, I am not making complaints, and I want you to realize that my confidence in you is complete.

6. Finally, I beg you personally and most urgently to authorize Paymaster Caillaux, accompanied by Corporal Ceccaldi, to be assigned to Sarraill's staff; he agrees to accept both of them! I know it.

There is no use in either of us creating political difficulties for ourselves; that is why I ask you most urgently to authorize this assignment. If it is not made, once peace returns, or even before, both you and I will have real enemies on our hands.

With most cordial regards,

MESSIMY.

tions. I also knew that there already existed some friction between Sir John French and the general commanding our Fifth Army.

I arrived at Saint-Quentin towards 10.30 a.m. D'Amade was already there. He was describing to me the difficult situation in which his troops found themselves, when Lanrezac in his turn arrived, he having received the evening before my instructions relative to the battle Amiens-Rheims-Verdun. He told me that he thoroughly understood my intentions and he raised no objections, except in regard to the elimination of the zones assigned to his army and to the British. He pointed out that nothing had ever prepared our Allies to take part in a combined manoeuvre and that they paid little attention to directions which were intended to co-ordinate the action of neighbouring armies. When I insisted on the necessity of having his army make frequent counter-attacks, in order to gain the time necessary for constituting a mass on our extreme left, he assured me that he expected to resume the offensive as soon as his forces had debouched from the close country around Avesnes, where his artillery could accomplish little. He also stated that his troops were in excellent condition to make an attack.

At this moment French came in, accompanied by General Murray, his Chief of Staff. I expected to find the same calm officer whose acquaintance I had made a few days before; but, to my great surprise, the British Commander-in-Chief started out immediately in a rather excited tone to explain that his army had been violently attacked, and that, the evening before, General Haig's corps had been obliged to fall back on Guise and the Cavalry Corps on Bohain (that is to say, into the zone assigned to the French Fifth Army); that his II Corps and General Snow's 4th Division were being pressed by the enemy in the direction of Le Catelet. He explained to me that since hostilities had begun his troops had been submitted to such hardships that he could not for the moment contemplate resuming the offensive. He considered the situation as being very delicate. More than once he made complaints concerning the manner in which the Fifth Army, his neighbour, had acted. He accused this army of having broken off the fight and left him completely isolated.

In reply, I said to the Field Marshal that all the Allied troops without exception had been pushed hard by the enemy and that he must not suppose that the British Army was the only one which had suffered from the severe conditions of the campaign. I also invited his attention to the importance which I attached to his conforming his manoeuvre to the general instructions which I had given to our armies, and that, in

particular, he make every effort to respect the zones of march reserved for each army, so as to avoid confusion.

I then urged with all my force that, since the first manœuvre, as conceived, had failed, he do everything that lay in his power to make it possible to fight the new battle which I had in view. I saw by his surprise that he was not acquainted with my intentions, and I asked him if he had received a copy of the Instructions of August 25th which I had sent him. He had not yet seen this paper, as it had never left General Murray's hands. I then explained my conception of the new manœuvre which I proposed to execute, indicating in detail the rôle which the British Army would be expected to play.

French immediately raised objections, and in spite of my insistence, I had the impression that he remained unconvinced. His idea was, above all, to fall back on Saint-Quentin. I promised him to give orders to Sordet, not only to cover the British left, but to intervene in the approaching battle with all his forces and most energetically. Moreover, at Sir John's request, I immediately gave orders to d'Amade to push his two fresh reserve divisions to Bray, so as to give support to the British Army. I then asked French if he expected to receive reinforcements from England shortly, and especially whether the 6th Infantry Division was coming; for in the situation in which the Allies now found themselves, they had need of every man. French replied that the Secretary of State for War contemplated sending this division to Belgium, in support of the Belgian Army. I represented to the Field Marshal how dangerous such a solution would be. I told him of my conviction that a decision would be obtained on the French front and nowhere else, and that every man Great Britain could furnish should be sent without delay to the left of our line of battle. I had the impression that on this point Sir John and I were in agreement.<sup>5</sup>

When I left British Headquarters in the early afternoon, I carried away with me a serious impression as to the fragility of our extreme left, and I anxiously asked myself if it could hold out long enough to enable me to effect the new grouping of our forces. I was impressed, moreover, by the lack of mutual comprehension between Field Marshal French and the commander of our Fifth Army. The temperaments of these two men, their mentalities, were so wholly different, that they seemed quite unable to work together under the hard strain of battle.

In the evening I returned to my headquarters. The reports which I

<sup>5</sup> General de La Panouse informed me (in a letter appearing in footnote on page 427) that Kitchener hesitated very much to send this division on the Continent.

found awaiting me from along the whole front were far from comforting. Colonel Paquette had brought back from the Fourth Army a pessimistic impression. The XVII Corps seemed to have gone to pieces; the other corps had met with serious losses during the fighting in the close country where they had been engaged. The Fourth Army was now falling back to the left bank of the Meuse, after blowing up the bridges. The Third Army was still holding on to the right bank, but with difficulty. From everywhere there arrived news of weaknesses which made me fear that the morale of the troops was broken; discouragement began to make itself felt in every grade of the army, and even at my own headquarters.

The attitude of the British also caused me great anxiety. During the day we had intercepted two German radio telegrams which indicated that the right group of the enemy's forces was expected to reach the line Cambrai Le Cateau that day; the leading elements of this group were to have attacked along their whole front at 9.10 a.m., and I was not without anxiety concerning the way our Allies would meet this assault, coming as it did at a moment which was particularly critical. The possibility of realizing our new manœuvre would depend in large part upon the tenacity of their resistance. Late in the night a very pessimistic telegram arrived from Colonel Huguet, dated Noyon, and giving me the worst sort of news as to the day's results. "The British Army," he said, "has met with defeat, and it now seems to have lost all cohesion. It will have to receive serious protection if it is to reorganize. British Headquarters this evening will be at Noyon." In the face of this situation, it was evident that if a grave disaster was to be avoided, our left would have to be organized under a sound commander furnished with all the elements necessary for him to make his action felt. My thoughts turned to Maunoury, who seemed to me more suitable than anyone else to take command under such difficult circumstances. In this way, it came about that, after having decided to dissolve the Army of Lorraine, I organized, in the early hours of the night of August 26th/27th, the Sixth Army and placed it under the command of General Maunoury. He was given the staff of the Army of Lorraine. He was to take command of all the forces which were being moved to the left of the French and British line, that is to say, the VII Corps, the 61st, 62nd, and 63rd Reserve Divisions, along with the 55th and 66th Reserve Divisions, General d'Amade keeping his four territorial divisions. The other territorial divisions belonging to the Army of Lorraine, I placed under the orders of General Paul Durand, of the Third Army. I requested General

Maunoury to come to my headquarters as soon as possible to receive instructions.

At the same time I thought it advisable to dissolve the Army of Alsace, most of whose elements had been taken to form the Sixth Army; the remainder were divided into two groups and handed over to General Dubail.

While these serious events were taking place, I learned from Captain Tardieu that a Ministerial crisis had arisen and that M. Messimy had tendered his resignation. He was to be replaced by M. Millerand. I was delighted to learn that a man in whom I had such entire faith, and for whom I felt the strongest friendship, was to assume the direction of the War Ministry in these difficult hours. M. Millerand's tenacity, his earnestness and patriotism, gave me confidence that he would be capable of meeting every emergency that arose.

The next morning, I received from M. Messimy the following letter:

Paris, August 27, 1914.

My dear General,

I have been "turned out" by the President of the Republic for having been too rough with the civil authorities and the press, but Millerand takes my place, and you can have complete and absolute confidence in him.

*I have need* for the future of a personal letter from you protesting against the official communiqué which they got<sup>6</sup> me to sign, saying "there are nothing but territorials in the region of the north." This is a repetition of what happened in August, 1870, when the article in the *Temps* appeared.

In five or six days I shall take up my duties as major of the General Staff, which is the post assigned to me in case of war. I am asking to be placed in the Intelligence Bureau.

In the meantime, here is my hand; I have faith in you and in France.

MESSIMY.

*August 27th.* Information which had arrived concerning the British Army showed that, instead of taking the general direction of Cambrai, which on August 24th I had indicated as its line of retreat, it had fallen back into the zone of march reserved for the Fifth Army, thus facilitating the envelopment which the right wing of the German forces was manifestly seeking to effect. The assembling of the Sixth Army had not progressed sufficiently for it to be able to protect the British retreat and give the time required to get these forces in hand. Under the circumstances, the most profitable solution appeared to be a vigorous attack by the

<sup>6</sup>The word as written was "forced," but a line had been drawn through it and the word "got" was put in its stead.



Fifth Army on the enemy around Guise and Vervins, in a south-north direction, the main force of the attack being directed along the left flank.

About 6 a.m. on the 27th, I learned that the Fifth Army had continued its retreat and that the intention of its commander was to establish himself behind the Oise and the Thon. This was far from conforming to the attitude I was counting upon General Lanrezac to take. The day before, at Saint-Quentin, he had informed me that as soon as he had left the wooded region where it was difficult to use his artillery, he intended to undertake a vigorous counter-attack against the enemy troops which were pursuing him. This corresponded entirely with my intention, which, I repeat, was to gain the time needed for assembling the Sixth Army. Moreover, the situation of the British Army necessitated an aggressive attitude in order to maintain on our front the largest possible number of the Germans. General Lanrezac had also assured me that his troops were in excellent shape and their morale high.

The region now reached by the Fifth Army seemed especially favourable for an operation of this kind, and I requested him to take advantage of the circumstances. I represented that there was no occasion whatever for him to occupy himself with what the British were doing on his left, and I added that if he did not take the stand I indicated he would injure the morale of his army, by continuing a retreat which was beginning to look like a definite defeat, and which risked compromising the whole fate of the campaign.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, in order to furnish some encouragement to Colonel Huguet, who had depicted in very dark colours the situation prevailing with our Allies, I informed him of the orders which had been given to General Lanrezac and which were designed to enable the British Army to execute a methodical retirement. In addition, I sent Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard to Noyon, accompanied by Major Clive, British liaison officer at my headquarters, with instructions to obtain details of the situation and give Sir John French information of the help we were sending.

Brécard had hardly left when Colonel Huguet telephoned me. He had just seen Sir John and informed him of my instructions to Lanrezac. French had replied that a feeling of bitterness and regret would unquestionably make itself felt in England when it became known under what conditions the British Army had made its first contact with the enemy. The Field Marshal suggested that if I could send a telegram recognizing the great services rendered to the common cause by his army, it would

<sup>7</sup> Message telephoned at 6.30 a.m., August 27th, by Lieutenant-Colonel Alexandre at G.H.Q. to Major Schneider of the staff of the Fifth Army.

have the effect of calming this state of feeling. I made haste to comply with this suggestion by expressing to Field Marshal Sir John French the gratitude of the French Army for the brave assistance which his troops had given to ours.

Upon receiving my instructions of that morning, Lanrezac informed me that he would halt his troops on the line of Vervins, holding himself ready to attack any forces which debouched south of the Oise. I was justified, therefore, in considering that this action would diminish the pressure of the enemy against the British and that the latter would profit by this circumstance to arrest their retirement; but about 2 p.m. I was informed that our Allies had evacuated Saint-Quentin and were retiring towards the south. This movement uncovered Lanrezac's left at the very moment he was getting ready to counter-attack, and it placed him in a very delicate situation. After asking for confirmation of this report, I made representations to Sir John French urging him to slow up the retreat of his army. I pointed out to him all the inconveniences which would result if this were not done, and I urged that the situation of his troops was in nowise critical, since we had two reserve divisions at Bertincourt and Bapaume, the whole of Sordet's Cavalry Corps in front, while new forces were detraining in the region of Chaumes. If a short halt could be made it would give time for the counter-attack of the Fifth Army to be effected, and this counter-attack would be certain to relieve the pressure then being exercised against the British.

General Maunoury now came to see me to receive instructions concerning the army that was being assembled in the region of Amiens and to whose command he had been appointed. I directed him to dispose his forces so that, once they were united, they could act offensively against the right flank of the enemy—in this way covering the left flank of the British army, which I hoped would make a halt on the front Ham-Tergnier. I also explained to him that later on an attack to be made by the Sixth Army would mark the beginning of our efforts to envelop the enemy's right flank.<sup>8</sup>

It was understood that the headquarters of the Sixth Army would be established first at Moreuil.

Maunoury had hardly left, with my instructions in his pocket, when news arrived which made me fear that all that I had conceived and prepared with a view to fighting a battle on the line Amiens-Laon-Rheims was about to fall to pieces. Towards 6 p.m. Huguet reported

<sup>8</sup> Special Instructions No. 19, handed to General Maunoury the afternoon of August 27th, when he reported at G.H.Q.

the arrival of a German cavalry division at Péronne,<sup>9</sup> and he described the situation as being "extremely grave"; he was afraid that the retreat of the British Army would change into a rout. Colonel Brécard, returning from Noyon about the same time, also brought pessimistic news. The preceding day, four German army corps had attacked our Allies, and during the evening, towards 6 o'clock, the latter had met with a costly defeat. Two divisions out of five had been almost destroyed and the others were in a bad state. General Wilson had told Brécard that the British troops would not be in condition to fight again for a week, and the British staff were preoccupied by only one thought—to slip away towards Compiègne and secure a breathing spell in which to re-organize.

Thus, at the very moment when, in my conceptions, I was placing the British near Ham, they already had their eyes turned in the direction of Compiègne. The situation had become agonizing. It seemed to me to be impossible to count upon their help for gaining the time required for forming the Sixth Army. Would even the rest of the front be able to hold on? Would I have to give up the idea of defending the line of the Aisne? Another question immediately arose: what would be the effect of the British retreat upon the attitude of the Fifth Army? It will be remembered that that very morning I had ordered this army to counter-attack towards the north; and now its left flank would be wholly uncovered.

About this time a German wireless message which we had intercepted gave us the information that the German First Army was expected to act independently during the time that their Second Army was investing Maubeuge.<sup>10</sup> This made it probable that along the front of the French Fifth Army the enemy's pursuit would be considerably slackened. In such a case it seemed useless to undertake an action by Lanrezac's troops towards the north, while an offensive pushed in the direction of the north-west would have the advantage of retarding the march of those enemy units which had been launched in pursuit of the British. From every point of view this operation appeared to me to be necessary and possible.

Therefore, towards 7 p.m. I decided to modify the orders previously given to Lanrezac, and I telegraphed him that, by reason of information indicating that a part of the forces opposed to him had halted in front of Maubeuge, he should move his left between the Oise and Saint-

<sup>9</sup> This information later on was found to be erroneous.

<sup>10</sup> Report No. 63, August 27, 1914, 6 p.m.; Intelligence Bureau, G.H.Q.

Quentin the next morning and attack all enemy forces in the act of marching against the British Army; it was essential to disengage this army at any cost.<sup>11</sup>

Lieutenant-Colonel Alexandre who was at Lanrezac's headquarters at Marle when this order arrived, telephoned me that the commander of the Fifth Army found serious objections to these new instructions. Therefore, at 10.15 p.m., I once more informed General Lanrezac how important I considered the strict execution of my orders to be. At the same time I decided that I would go to Marle myself the next morning.

The news of all these events, which so seriously aggravated our situation, reached me while the new Minister of War, M. Millerand was at my headquarters. He had come not only to make me a visit of courtesy but also, indeed above all, with the object of obtaining information himself as to the situation. He was accompanied by M. Messimy, who had donned his uniform of major of chasseurs.

While I was engaged with M. Millerand, Major Gamelin, whom I had sent that morning to the headquarters of General de Langle, came into my office to report the result of his mission. It appeared that the day before enemy troops had crossed the Meuse below Sedan, and the commander of the Fourth Army having decided to counter-attack them that day, the 27th, Major Gamelin had witnessed the beginning of the operation. It had seemed to him that the staff of the Fourth Army was somewhat nervous at learning that the enemy had established himself in force on the left bank of the Meuse, from Donchery to Autrécourt; on the other hand, the perfect confidence of General de Langle and of his chief of staff, General Maistre, had greatly impressed him. De Langle had given orders to his corps to combine their efforts in driving the enemy back across the Meuse. On leaving Fourth Army headquarters, Gamelin had gone to La Besace, headquarters of General Roques, commanding the XII Corps. Here again he had been struck by the order and serenity which prevailed. Before leaving for Vitry he had witnessed the commencement of the counter-attack, which opened with good promise of succeeding.

Towards 10 p.m. news came from the Fourth Army confirming the

<sup>11</sup> The above telegram (No. 2500) reached Marle at 8.20 p.m., that is to say, a short time after General Lanrezac had informed me of the orders which he had given for the 28th, in accordance with my instructions of the morning. These were to close his front towards the left and hold himself ready to attack any column which should cross the Oise. Lanrezac's report reached G.H.Q. about 9 p.m. To avoid any confusion, General Berthelot sent a new telegram to the commander of the Fifth Army at 9.45 p.m., confirming orders No. 2500 and specifying that Lanrezac's left should attack any forces of the enemy marching against the British between Saint-Quentin and the Oise.

satisfactory results obtained during the day. In order to consolidate his success, de Langle requested that the Third Army in its turn should attack, thus relieving the Fourth Army from the work of holding a part of this front.

Equally good news came in from the First and Second Armies. Although much reduced by heavy losses, these two armies, during fourteen days of fighting, had given an example of tenacity and courage which I was happy to announce in orders to the rest of our forces. During the evening we learned that the First Army was continuing its offensive on the field it had fought over on August 25th and 26th, and that everywhere along the reconquered ground there were evidences of the serious losses inflicted upon the Germans.

While I saw that this news impressed the Minister of War most favourably, I did not hide from him the fact that I was gravely pre-occupied over the situation on my left. At 10 p.m. Colonel Huguet telephoned me that the British Army, the next morning, would fall back between the Oise and La Fère. This retreat completed the uncovering of the Fifth Army's left, while at the same time it left Maunoury's right wing in the air. At almost the same moment, I received a letter which Colonel Huguet had sent from Noyon at 5.30 p.m. and which confirmed my apprehensions. It ran as follows:

"I have the honour to confirm my telegram of last evening, August 26th, informing you of the defeat inflicted yesterday upon the British Army. Later information which has just reached me indicates that the situation is extremely critical. For the moment, the British Army is beaten and is incapable of any serious effort. The right column—1st and 2nd Divisions—now retreating on Origny-Saint-Benoît, still presents some aspects of cohesion; the same may be said of the 4th; but the 3rd and 5th divisions, most severely tried, having lost a great many men, a large part of their artillery and transport and having been subjected to a most violent artillery fire during nearly 36 hours, are now nothing more than disorganized bands, incapable of offering the smallest resistance and not in a condition to take their place again on the field of battle until they have been rested and completely refitted.

"Fortunately the pursuit has not been vigorous. It is hoped that this evening the divisions can reach the front, Roisel for the 4th Division, Normand for the 3rd Division, the region north of Saint-Quentin for the 5th Division, and Mont d'Origny for the 1st and 2nd Divisions. There is not yet any news at hand concerning the cavalry division. Tomorrow, August 28th, they should reach the general line, Ham for the 4th and 3rd divisions, Saint-Simon for the 5th Division, Jussy and La Fère for the 1st and 2nd Divisions. Conditions are such that for the moment the British Army no longer exists. It will not be in a condition to take the field again until it has been thor-



oughly reëd and reconstituted; that is to say, for at least three out of the five divisions, not for some days, or even a few weeks.

"The blow to British pride will be intense, and already recriminations and reproaches are heard. To prevent them from spreading, it is important that our gratitude be immediately expressed to the British Army and the British Nation for the great sacrifices which they have made in our cause; it is for this reason that this morning I telephoned you the message from Sir John French, suggesting that the French Commander-in-Chief send a message of thanks to his army. It would be well if the French Government would do the same.

"I have informed General Lanrezac and General Sordet of the situation of the British Army—the first, in order that he may have knowledge of the danger which may menace his own left; the second, in order that he may continue to protect the retreat of the British from any danger threatening their rear or coming from the west. In conformity with the indications brought here this morning by Colonel Brécard, I have informed General Sordet that this duty devolves upon him until such time as the British Army is in complete security behind the Somme; after which he should maintain himself in the region of Saint-Quentin until he receives instructions from you.

"It is not yet possible to say where and under what conditions the reconstitution of the British Army can take place; it may even be that the British Government will exact that the whole force retire to its base at Le Havre until such time as, having been rested, filled up and re-organized, it will once more be in condition to take the field. But of one thing there can be no doubt whatever and that is as to the temporary nature of this pause. For the resolution of the British is unshaken, and, indeed, they are more determined than ever to recommence fighting as soon as they can.

"It is, therefore, impossible to count upon this Army for some time, and it is evident that the enveloping movement which has been going on during the last week, and which has brought against the left wing of our line a mass quite sufficient to overwhelm it, will continue to be pursued; and it can now be executed under conditions all the more favourable, in that our line will have become shorter. It would seem, therefore, that General Lanrezac's left, composed of reserve divisions and the XVIII Corps, will find itself in a few days seriously menaced; the movement will thus continue to spread from left to right.

"The only way of meeting a threat as certain and as dangerous as this is, would seem to be to form on our left a new and powerful army, composed of all the active corps it is possible to take from the rest of our line (even at the sacrifice of the safety of certain parts of our territory), in order to concentrate our whole effort on our left flank. It is here that a decision will be obtained in a period of time now very short. Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard had a conversation this morning on this subject with General Wilson, which was most constructive and conclusive; you will already have received his report when this letter reaches you, but I feel it my duty to indicate to you the grave interest which it presents."

I did not conceal from M. Millerand the gravity of the situation on our left wing. I told him that the manœuvre planned along the line Amiens, La Fère, Laon, Craonne and the Aisne, was on the point of being compromised, and that the condition of the British Army made it uncertain whether the detraining of the Sixth Army could be completed. Our duty was to face squarely the grave consequences which would result. More especially was it necessary to inform the Government that probably in four or five days the German cavalry would arrive before the gates of Paris. It was urgent to prepare public opinion for this eventuality and to make everybody understand that our final victory was dependent on a determination to defend ourselves to the bitter end. What we must do now was to hold fast for such length of time as was needed for organizing a new manœuvre; if this should again fail, then have the courage to wait for still another.

After this, M. Millerand and I proceeded to examine the general situation, more particularly in regard to the Russians. News coming from their front was favourable. Their offensive was progressing successfully, and a German corps, surrounded on its left flank, had been obliged to abandon Osterode. It was, therefore, permissible to hope that if the success of our Allies continued, the enemy would be obliged to withdraw important forces from the French front and send them to Russia and that within two weeks we might expect to see the pressure on our line considerably relieved. Moreover, it was not to be forgotten that the Germans had put all their hope in the prompt destruction of the French Army, and this army was as yet intact; indeed, it was still capable of a most vigorous effort, and this effort would be demanded of it as soon as a favourable occasion presented itself.

We then discussed the situation of Paris, and I told the Minister of the confidence I felt in Gallieni's ability to organize the defence of the Capital. In this connection I spoke to M. Millerand of the order that M. Messimy had given to me two days before to send three active army corps to the entrenched camp of Paris for the purpose of assisting in its defence. I explained my point of view, which was that the only way Paris could be defended was by the operations of our armies in the field, and that every available man, without any exception, should take his place in the forthcoming manœuvre and fight in the battle which would decide the fate of our country; any unit diverted from this task, whether assigned to the defence of Paris or not, would be badly employed. The Minister represented to me the necessity of providing for the Capital's safety, and, to that end, of making the necessary assignment of troops.

I now informed M. Millerand of the visit I intended to make the next morning to Marle, for the purpose of pressing General Lanrezac to execute the operation which I had prescribed for him, and which now appeared to me more and more necessary. This visit would enable me to make a study on the spot of the possibility of engaging, during the early days of September, the battle I had in mind. After this long conversation, the Minister had a talk with a number of the officers of my staff. He slept that night at G.H.Q. and left the next morning at 5.30, just as I was leaving to see Lanrezac.

*August 28th.* On the morning of August 28th, before leaving for Marle, I read the reports which had come in during the night. Amongst these, one particularly arrested my attention. It stated that during the afternoon of the preceding day an aerial reconnaissance had observed enemy columns in the region of Chimay, apparently marching towards the south; also heavy concentrations of troops at that place and at Rocroi. This was a threat manifestly directed against the left of the Fourth Army—a very sensitive spot in view of its uncertain union with the Fifth Army—and the movement appeared to have a connection with the action of the troops which General de Langle had attacked in the region of Donchery. The size of the German forces reported gave rise to the fear that this operation would succeed in breaking our line. The liaison between the Fourth and Fifth Armies needed to be reinforced, and steps had to be taken to provide against any contingency in this direction. I, therefore, decided to form a detachment whose mission it would be to ensure the liaison between de Langle and Lanrezac.

In consequence, I gave orders to General Berthelot, who remained at G.H.Q. during my absence, to send immediately for General Foch, then commanding the XX Army Corps, and inform him of the mission I proposed to confide to him. I also ordered him to direct General de Langle to begin without delay the movement in retreat prescribed in my instructions of August 25th, indicating that he must fall back behind the Aisne.<sup>12</sup>

I arrived at Marle about 8.30 a.m., and as soon as I saw Lanrezac, I was struck by his physical condition. Marks of fatigue lined his face; his colour was sallow, his eyes bloodshot. He immediately began, with gesticulations which betrayed his nervous condition, to raise objections to the orders he had received the day before, alleging the tired condition

<sup>12</sup> When sending for General Foch, I directed him to bring with him Colonel Weygand, whom I wished to assign as Foch's chief of staff. Shortly before the war, Weygand had been singled out at the Centre of Higher Military Studies as a most exceptional officer.

of his troops and the menace which threatened him from the north. I again explained to him the situation of the British Army, of which he could not be ignorant, and I signified to him that in view of all the circumstances it was absolutely necessary for him to make an attack in the direction of Saint-Quentin. The tone of the conversation became heated and I was obliged to remind Lanrezac that Sir John French's grievances against our Army were above all to be imputed to him. On the Sambre he had fallen back at the very moment that French had informed him he was going to attack, and two days before he had again allowed the British to be crushed without coming to their aid.

For lack of other arguments, Lanrezac finally said that he had received no written order directing him to attack. I told Gamelin, who was with me, to draw up one immediately. He sat down at the end of the table, with General Hély d'Oissel, chief of staff of the Fifth Army, and wrote out the following order, which I signed: "The Fifth Army as soon as possible will attack the troops engaged yesterday against the British. It will cover its right with a minimum of forces and will send out wide reconnaissances in that direction." General Lanrezac declared himself satisfied and ready to obey. He said, moreover, that he had already given orders that morning in the sense I had indicated.

Just as this conversation ended, General de MasLatrie, commanding the XVIII Corps, who happened to be at headquarters of the Fifth Army, asked to see me. He was suffering from dysentery and seemed to be in a state of partial collapse. I pointed out to him the seriousness of the moment and ordered him to exact from his troops the full measure of their effort; the fate of the country was at stake. Then General Hache arrived, worn out with fatigue as a result of the terrific fighting of his 40th Division. Having the highest esteem for this gallant and intelligent soldier, I had nominated him, upon the recommendation of General Lanrezac, to the command of the III Corps. Hache regretted his fine division and begged me to leave him where he was. I would not change my decision, and told him I relied on his self-abnegation and sense of duty.

The impression I brought back with me from this visit was so painful that, when I reached G.H.Q., I decided that I would return the next morning to Lanrezac and supervise his execution of my orders. But it was indispensable for me to remain at Vitry long enough not only to co-ordinate the operations of the Fifth Army with those of the British and of the Sixth Army, but also to take measures to meet the menace revealed by our aviation in the region of Rocroi, and especially to give Foch my instructions regarding the mission I was going to assign him.

On arriving at Vitry, I was informed of the news which had come in during the day concerning our Cavalry Corps and the 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions. Sordet had used his divisions separately the day before, engaging them under good conditions north and east of Péronne, after which he had brought them back to cantonments on the south bank of the Somme; the two reserve divisions had operated on the left of the Cavalry Corps, and they appeared to have had a successful day. I had inquiries made by telephone to find out what Maunoury's first impressions were and to learn his present intentions. The commander of the Sixth Army replied that he expected to establish himself on the Somme during the evening; he would place the 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions in the region of Péronne, with elements of the 55th and 56th Reserve Divisions between Saint-Simon and Saint-Christ; the last mentioned divisions were expected to complete detraining that evening at midnight; after this, he would push the VII Corps towards the Somme.<sup>13</sup>

These arrangements appeared to me satisfactory, since in the Fifth Army the III Corps and a reserve division were expected to reach the Oise above Moy during the course of the same day. To make certain that our front would be continuous, and thus ensure the development of the Fifth Army's attack towards Saint-Quentin, it was only necessary for the British Army to consent to halt its rear-guards on the Crozat Canal between Saint-Simon and Tergnier. I asked Sir John French if his forces could assume this rôle of liaison between the Fifth and Sixth Armies, and I charged Colonel Brécard with the mission of aiding the British Army, Maunoury's Army and Sordet's Cavalry Corps to co-ordinate their actions. In this way, towards the end of the afternoon, I had reason to hope that our left was at last in a favourable defensive position behind the wide obstacle presented by the Somme, the Crozat Canal and the Oise; if these conditions were maintained, the attack of the Fifth Army the next morning against Saint-Quentin would give us the respite needed to complete the constitution of the Sixth Army and enable it, in its turn, to make an enveloping movement against the German right.

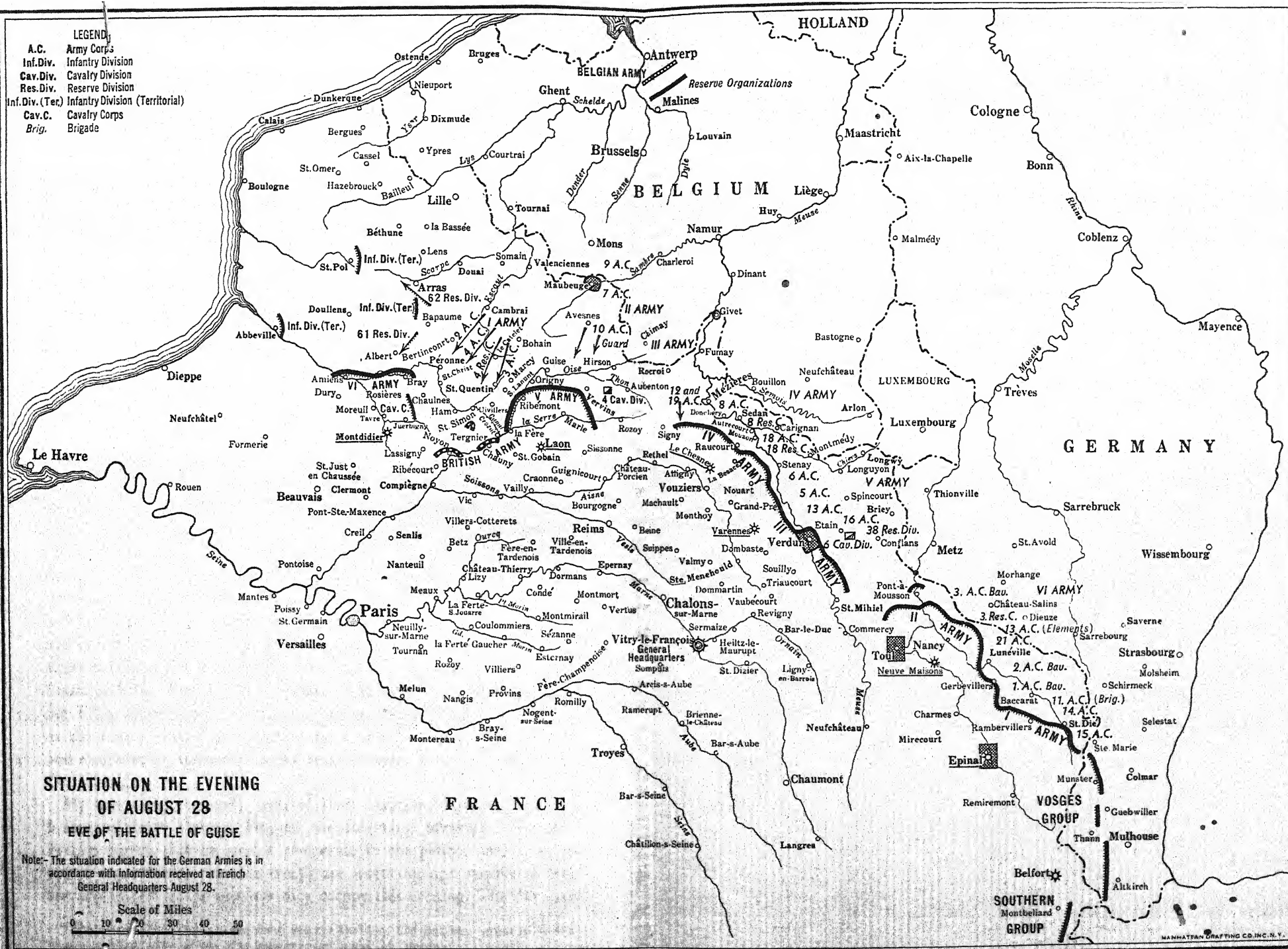
My hopes, unfortunately, were of short duration. Towards 8.30 p.m. I received from Colonel Huguet the following telegram: "Sir John French regrets that he cannot co-operate in the general action to the extent requested by you. His troops are worn out and require at least one day of rest in the quarters they occupy this evening. The day after

<sup>13</sup> The command of the 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions had just been given to General Ebener, formerly chief of the War Ministry staff under M. Messimy.





**LEGEND**  
 A.C. Army Corps  
 Inf.Div. Infantry Division  
 Cav.Div. Cavalry Division  
 Res.Div. Reserve Division  
 Inf.Div. (Ter) Infantry Division (Territorial)  
 Cav.C. Cavalry Corps  
 Brig. Brigade





tomorrow they will be capable of holding the line of the Crozat Canal, if necessary. If later on the French Army is victorious, the Field Marshal will put his troops at your disposal as reserves."

Shortly afterwards a telephone message from the Sixth Army, confirmed a moment later by Major Maurin, liaison officer between Maunoury and G.H.Q., informed me that nobody knew what had become of the 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions, and that General Ebener, appointed to take command of them, had vainly sought them during the day. He supposed that they must have fallen back towards Amiens, before columns of the enemy reported to be marching in an east-west direction in the region of Péronne, whence the sound of a heavy cannonade proceeded. Towards midnight we learned that the 61st Reserve Division had been driven back upon Amiens, but no news came in regarding the 62nd.

Thus, the line of the Somme was no longer held, and, what was more, the detrainning area of the Sixth Army would before long be seriously menaced by the enemy's advance. Under these circumstances, the only hope I could see of bringing about a change in the situation was through the success of the Fifth Army's attack. I, therefore, felt the need of again pressing General Lanrezac to make the action of his army as vigorous as possible.

During this afternoon of the 28th, while bending all my efforts to stabilizing our situation on the left and making ready the offensive of the Fifth Army, I was also obliged to occupy myself with the threat which was taking shape in the region of Rocroi against the left of the Fourth Army. The attitude of General de Langle, commanding this army, was in strong contrast with that of General Lanrezac; for at a moment when I was forced repeatedly to stimulate the latter to a more energetic resistance, the former resolutely refused to yield an inch of ground to the enemy. Under his ardent leadership, the Fourth Army, after defending every obstacle offered by the terrain, now tenaciously held to its positions along the Meuse, having made the enemy pay dearly for the small progress he had managed to effect on its left bank.

However, the execution of the idea I had conceived on August 25th—that of establishing a battle front resting on the Somme and on the Aisne—made it undesirable that the Fourth Army should delay along the Meuse, and all the more so since the danger reported in the direction of Rocroi might at any moment threaten its left.

When I returned to G.H.Q., after my visit to Lanrezac, I learned that the Fourth Army was fully engaged, evidently with the intention of

trying to drive the Germans into the river. In spite of the serious losses suffered by de Langle's men, their morale was very high, and it seemed hard for them to have to give up the advantages they had gained and start a retreat at the very moment they felt themselves to be winning. I cannot praise too highly the conduct of Général de Langle. Towards 5 p.m. he informed me that his situation was excellent, above all on the wings, and before obeying the order to retreat which I had given him, he asked leave to point this out, adding that he ventured to wait for new orders before doing anything further. It was impossible for me to hesitate, and, while admiring his energetic attitude, I felt obliged, in the general interest of the manœuvre, to tell de Langle that I authorized him to remain on the Meuse just long enough to establish his success, but early the next morning his main body must be established upon the high ground south-west of the river; after this he must resume the retirement prescribed in Instructions No. 25, conforming his movement to that of the two neighbouring armies.

Moreover, while the efforts of the Fourth Army had brought considerable results, it was also certain that the men had very nearly reached the limit of their strength, and there was reason to fear—as, indeed, during the evening General de Langle informed me—that they could not hold the line of the Aisne much longer.

Fortunately, the menace presented by the enemy's forces concentrated in the region of Rocroi, did not materialize further during the day, and when, towards 5 p.m., General Foch arrived at my headquarters, the problem had assumed another aspect. The Fourth Army, which had been very powerfully constituted with a view to the offensive movement at first conceived for it, had now become too cumbrous for the manœuvre I was about to undertake. In order to lighten it, I decided to take from its left the IX and XI Army Corps, the 52nd and 60th Reserve Divisions and the 9th Cavalry Division, and combine them into a detachment under General Foch, who would take his orders from the commander of the Fourth Army. It was understood that Foch's detachment, in case of need, would cover the main body of de Langle's army against enemy forces which might debouch from the region of Rocroi, at the same time ensuring the liaison between the Fourth and Fifth Armies.

It now remained to regulate the attitude of the First and Second Armies. Hurriedly reorganized, they had that very morning resumed the offensive. Towards the end of the afternoon General de Castelnau, in view of the fact that his own right and the left of the First Army had been obliged to fall back, had asked whether he was expected merely



to hold fast, or was he to continue the offensive. I immediately telegraphed to him and to General Dubail that it was simply a question for them of holding out, at the same time keeping the enemy forces opposed to them as busy as possible and making sure that contact between their two armies was maintained.

As a matter of fact, the front of these two armies underwent little change up to September 3rd. During the afternoon, General Pau, whose army had been dissolved, arrived at G.H.Q., where he confirmed the impression that in Upper Alsace the situation had reached a state of equilibrium.

It will thus be seen that at the end of this day, August 28th, the situation was fairly favourable along the greater part of the front, although on our left the constitution of the Sixth Army seemed to have been compromised. The question I asked myself was this: would the offensive of the Fifth Army, fixed for the next day, sufficiently re-establish our affairs at this end of the line to justify my hope of delivering a battle in the form I desired? The answer could only come tomorrow.

*August 29th.* The last hours of the night of August 28th/29th brought in still more bad news. It appeared that the German First Army had penetrated between Péronne and Saint-Quentin. At Péronne the French forces had been obliged to retreat and the detrainning area of the Sixth Army had become more and more endangered. It began to look as though nothing could prevent the victorious march of the German right wing in the direction of Paris, which place, in all likelihood, was its objective. If, as every indication led me to suppose, the Sixth Army was caught in the very act of detrainning, it would not be able to undertake the offensive I had assigned to it, and our front of battle must be drawn back to a new line, possibly to the wide obstacle offered by the Seine. On the left, the Sixth Army would be established on the Lower Seine; with it would be the British, whose eyes were already turned towards Rouen; the Fifth Army would be in the region of Paris, the Fourth on the Middle Seine, and the Third between the Seine and the Meuse. It was in accordance with this conception that I warned General d'Amade that if, after having defended the Somme and blown up the bridges across that river, he was obliged to retreat, he should move towards Rouen.<sup>14</sup> It was with the same idea that I informed the Minister of War that the garrison of the entrenched camp of Paris would be reinforced, in case of need, by a part of Lanrezac's army.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in order to furnish additional

<sup>14</sup> Telegram No. 2666 of August 29, 1914, to General d'Amade.

<sup>15</sup> Report No. 2671, August 29, 1914, 8.20 a.m., to the Minister of War.

means for putting Paris in a state of defence, I directed that the 45th Division, just arriving from Algeria, be sent to the region of the Capital.

If it was my duty to make plans for meeting the hypothesis stated above, I nevertheless hoped that the attack of the Fifth Army on the right bank of the Oise would re-establish the situation. Nothing could better show how great was the importance I attached to this operation.

Now, the state of mind in which I had found General Lanrezac the day before made me fear that the commander of the Fifth Army was not in a fit state to undertake the capital task which lay before him. It will be remembered that I had already decided to go in person to his headquarters during the coming battle; I had even decided that if such a step seemed necessary, I would relieve General Lanrezac and pass his command to another man, in spite of all the inconveniences presented by such a change in the midst of an engagement. What was needed at such a moment was a soldier of inflexible will-power and energy. I had thought of General Franchet d'Esperey, whose work at the head of the I Corps had been characterized by exactly such qualities. It was with these ideas in my mind that I left my headquarters at 7.30 a.m., arriving an hour and a half later at Laon, to which place the headquarters of the Fifth Army had been removed.

I had the satisfaction of finding General Lanrezac infinitely calmer than he had been the day before, and above all more master of himself. I was present during the whole morning in his office while he dictated his orders, and I had the impression that he was directing the battle with authority and method. Unfortunately, the first information which came in was not very favourable. Instead of a battle facing north-west, the action was engaged in a northerly direction, against forces debouching from the Nouvion Forest where our air reconnaissances had failed to locate them. At the moment when I left Lanrezac to get my luncheon at the buffet of the railway station at Laon, we had been checked nearly everywhere on the front of the Oise. Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard, who was passing through Laon, found me at table and reported what he had learned that morning at Montdidier, at Maunoury's headquarters and from Sordet's Cavalry Corps.

Maunoury, whose calm had greatly impressed Brécard, was, at the moment, in a very delicate situation. The 65th Division had only detrained five battalions and two groups of artillery; no units of the 56th had yet arrived in the zone of concentration of the army; the 63rd Reserve Division was only commencing to detrain; the 61st had not arrived, and nobody knew where the 62nd was. It was under these con-



IN THE FOREST OF VILLERS-COTTERET.



ditions that General Maunoury was expecting an attack from the enemy, and he had nothing with which to oppose it but the VII Army Corps.

Colonel Brécard had then visited the Cavalry Corps. Men and horses were worn out with fatigue. The mounted units no longer constituted more than a single division; Lieutenant-Colonel Sérret's chasseur battalions, attached to the corps, had met with a grave reverse at Péronne the day before, and only scattered elements of them were left. Fortunately, the German attack along the Somme did not seem to be conducted with very great energy. Before leaving Laon I returned to Lanrezac's headquarters, where I learned that the situation was not improving and there was fear that, as a consequence of the attack delivered against it in the region of Guise, the Fifth Army would be unable to make its action felt in the direction of Saint-Quentin, as I had so greatly hoped it could do.

On leaving Lanrezac I went by way of Soissons to the Château de Compiègne, where Sir John French had established his headquarters. I was anxious to see the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army again, for it had been rumoured that both he and his Government were turning their eyes in the direction of their bases on the Channel and I was afraid that, in his desire to draw closer to them, the Field Marshal might be quitting our line of battle for a long time; this would render any resumption of the offensive impossible.

I explained to French the general situation on our left wing, and more particularly the conditions obtaining on the left of the Fifth Army, where General Valabrègue's reserve divisions were in a very difficult position. I pointed out to him how important it was for the British Army to keep in contact with its neighbours on each side, in order to prevent a breach being opened in the Allied line of battle. I urged upon him that the Russian offensive was certain to produce an effect very shortly and thus oblige the Germans to withdraw from our front a portion of the forces engaged there; this necessity, I added, was sure to relieve the pressure upon our forces. If, therefore, the British Army could remain in the line until the Sixth Army had been definitely constituted, there was no doubt in my mind that the circumstances would become favourable for the resumption of a general offensive. Moreover, the Crozat Canal offered an excellent obstacle behind which the British Army could make its stand.

My arguments seemed to produce no effect upon French. Moreover, while I was talking, I distinctly saw his chief of staff, Sir Archibald Murray, pulling the skirt of the Field Marshal's tunic, as if to prevent



him from yielding to my insistence. Thus all I could obtain from him was the reply: "No, no; my troops need forty-eight hours of absolute rest. When they have had this I shall be ready to participate in anything you want to do; but not any sooner."

Murray went out for a moment and returned with a paper containing the information brought in that day by the air force; it indicated that strong enemy forces were assembled in front of the British Army. I saw that nothing was going to shake the Field Marshal's decision, and I was obliged to leave him without having obtained any results. I confess that when I departed from Compiègne I was in a very bad humour, for it was certain that the Amiens-Verdun manœuvre was now impossible and another would have to be devised.

The road to my headquarters lay through Rheims, and, in crossing the square in front of the cathedral, I saw General Wilson's car standing before the statue of Joan of Arc. The General was evidently expecting some one, for he was pacing up and down in front of the cathedral doors. I immediately stopped my car and went up to him. He said he was just returning from Vitry. We started talking, and I explained my point of view to him, without in any way concealing from him the impression I had received during my interview with his chief. Wilson perceived very clearly the gravity of the situation, and he promised me to do all he could to bring Sir John French around to a different point of view from the one now evidently fixed in his mind. After about ten minutes' talk I returned to my car and reached my headquarters at Vitry about 9.30 p.m.

Berthelot was waiting for me with the news which had come in during the day. First, I learned that the Sixth Army had been attacked at ten o'clock that morning<sup>16</sup> from Bray-sur-Somme as far as Ham, by forces estimated as being two army corps at least. In presence of this attack, Maunoury had asked what were his orders in case he was driven back. The reply given was that he should retire first to the Avre and ultimately upon Saint-Just-en-Chaussée, but he must avoid any action which might become decisive.

However, towards noon the enemy suddenly halted his attacks, and even fell back slightly. This led the VII Corps, the only one engaged during the day, to suspend its retreat, and it proceeded to occupy the Avre from La Neuville-Saint-Bernard to Guerbigny. Reports had come in at almost the same moment from both the French and British air forces stating that numerous German columns which had been moving

<sup>16</sup> That is to say, shortly after Colonel Brécard had left Montdidier.

down towards the Somme had now turned back, and seemed to be directing their move towards the north. This information was of the highest interest, although it was impossible to give it an interpretation.

No recent news had arrived from the British, but a whole series of reports had reached G.H.Q. concerning the Fifth Army. Between the Oise and Saint-Quentin our troops, which, towards 3.30 p.m., had reached the line Urville-Mesnil-Saint-Laurent-Marcy, had had their left driven back towards the Oise by columns coming from the west; Valabrègue's reserve divisions on the extreme left were in danger for a moment of being cut off from the Saint-Gobain Forest. During the evening, while the III Corps was attacking Guise, the right of the Fifth Army had had a success, driving to the north of the Oise the German Guard and the X Corps and inflicting severe losses upon them.

In general, if the offensive of the Fifth Army had not succeeded in completely re-establishing the situation, as I had a right to hope it would do, it had without any possible doubt drawn upon itself the German columns which had been marching against Péronne; it had thus relieved the pressure in front of the British Army and our Sixth Army. Evidently it was this attack which had caused the face-about of the enemy columns marching against the Sixth Army.

Since I had not been able to obtain from the British any promise that their retirement would proceed more slowly, and as the attack made against Valabrègue's divisions ran the risk of compromising the situation of the Fifth Army, I decided that there was no longer any reason for maintaining that Army on the Oise; I gave orders for it to fall back behind the Serre, blowing up the bridges at La Fère, Coudren and Chauny.<sup>17</sup>

The contact between the Fourth and Fifth Armies, already weak enough, due to the latter having diverged towards the left, was still further compromised by the movement of this army in the direction of Saint-Quentin. The duty of re-establishing this contact now fell to General Foch, who had spent the morning at G.H.Q., attending to the organization of his detachment. He left Vitry early in the afternoon and proceeded to Machault to assume command. On my arrival at G.H.Q., no news from this part of the front had come in.

<sup>17</sup> As a consequence of a grave mistake committed by the signal service of G.H.Q., this order failed to be immediately transmitted to the Fifth Army. The omission was not discovered until the next morning at about 6 o'clock, when General Lanrezac telephoned to ask for instructions. It was in this way that the telegraphic order to fall back behind the Serre, which I signed August 29th at 10 p.m., did not reach the Fifth Army until the next morning at about 7 o'clock.

The reports coming from the Fourth Army were good. The orders for the retirement had been executed without difficulty, the enemy had nowhere attacked, and only weak detachments had been observed on the left bank of the Meuse.

In order to make preparations for reinforcing our armies of the left and centre, I had sent word to headquarters of the Third Army, during the afternoon of the preceding day, to warn General Ruffey of my intention to withdraw the Sixth Corps from him; I intended to move this corps to our left, the movement beginning on August 29th. But on the morning of that day I received from the commander of the Third Army a letter informing me that he expected an immediate attack, and for this reason he urged that the VI Corps should not be taken from him. In the face of his apprehensions, I yielded,—but with the greatest unwillingness,—deciding that the 42nd Division alone would be moved to Guignicourt, to become a part of the Foch Detachment. During the evening of the 29th the staff of the Third Army telephoned that up to 3 o'clock no attack had taken place, but the army commander still anticipated that one would be delivered against his left.

My attention for some time had been drawn to the conditions which prevailed at the headquarters of this army. I knew Ruffey well; I realized that he was intelligent, but changeable and imaginative to an excessive degree. What made the situation worse was that General Grossetti, that magnificent soldier, who covered himself with glory a few weeks later in Champagne and in Flanders, did not seem to be in his proper place as chief of staff of an army. He wanted to do everything himself, he made poor use of his assistants, and regrettable delays—and still more regrettable acts of forgetfulness—in the transmission of orders were without doubt imputable to him. All of this brought about a state of discontent in the staff of the Third Army, which Major Bel, with his uprightness and conscientiousness, did not fail to report to me.

Now at this critical moment in our affairs, when my attention was necessarily concentrated upon the grave events taking place on our left, it was essential that I should be relieved of any anxiety concerning our armies on the right and in the centre. The First and Second seemed in very good shape and appeared even to be gaining some ground. I decided to investigate personally the situation obtaining in the Third Army. If it turned out to be as described, I was resolved to place General Sarraill in charge of it, for as head of the VI Corps he had proved himself to be a calm and energetic commander. As for Grossetti, I thought that he would render better service in command of a division, and I intended to replace

him by Colonel Leboucq, at present assistant chief of staff of the Third Army, and an officer of the highest value as I well knew. I put off taking a definite decision regarding these changes until the next day, after I had examined the situation for myself.

During the night of August 29th/30th another question arose in my mind, that of moving my headquarters. Whatever trend events might take, it was evident that, in view of the retirement which had taken place on our left and centre, Vitry would not be conveniently situated for communication with the headquarters of the various armies. I gave orders to find out at once if Bar-sur-Aube was suitable. (It should not be forgotten that to install telegraphic and telephonic communications for an organism such as G.H.Q. required very important modifications of existing lines.) In spite of all precautions, the news of these preparations spread amongst the personnel of my staff and increased the nervousness which I felt about me. Only a few of my officers had maintained their calm intact. We lived in the midst of such rapidly succeeding events, we passed through such alternatives of hope and discouragement, that the nerves of all were subjected to a severe trial. The unvarying optimism of Berthelot marked a happy exception amidst the general nervousness and anxiety.

*August 30th.* The situation as it appeared to me on August 30th was as follows: The Somme had been crossed by the enemy above Amiens; a part of the German First Army was reported near Chaulnes, Lihons and Rozières; the French Sixth Army, in the very act of detraining, had been obliged to retire behind the Avre; Lanrezac's army, it was presumed, had received the order to take up a position behind the Serre (on account of the dangerous situation created for it by the retreat of the British); and finally, as a result of my interview on the afternoon of the 29th with Sir John French, I no longer nourished any hope of holding our Allies on the anticipated line of battle. They were preparing to retire behind a line running roughly from Compiègne to Soissons, thus creating a most dangerous gap between our Sixth Army, in course of formation, and our Fifth Army. Even if I had preserved the slightest illusions on this subject, Sir John French himself took pains to destroy them by sending word to me, early in the afternoon of the 30th, that the British Army would not be in condition to take its place in the line for another ten days.

It was quite evident that the offensive battle I had conceived on the 25th was now out of the question in the form I had planned. Indeed, for the moment, it did not seem possible that we could oppose the Ger-

man right wing with a force strong enough to check the enveloping movement which, logically, would lead our enemies to the gates of Paris. Nevertheless, it did seem possible to make dispositions facing in a general way towards the north-north-west and offering the hope of renewing under more favourable conditions our attempt against the communications of the German right wing. In other words, it was a question of re-editing the manoeuvre which we had essayed originally in a north-easterly direction by 'debouching from the Meuse. General Berthelot was a strong partisan of this manoeuvre, and after having discussed it with him for quite a long time, I directed Colonel Pont, chief of the Operations Bureau, to make a preliminary study of the orders required for its execution. The following is the text of the memorandum which he drew up in consequence:

## GENERAL HEADQUARTERS

Armies of the East

General Staff, 3rd Bureau

VITRY, August 30, 1914.

## MEMORANDUM

The further movements to be effected by our armies should have for their object the following:

To hold out—but at the same time not exposing our forces to destruction—until such time as a propitious moment presents itself for resuming a forward movement.

To take advantage of every favourable occasion for striking at the enemy, and thus maintain the morale of our own troops?

To give such a direction to the march of the various armies as would place them in a position to resume the offensive at any instant.

*In what way can this offensive be accomplished?*

It seems no longer possible to oppose the German right with sufficient forces to arrest its enveloping movement, which may lead it to Paris.

However, the presence of our armies in Lorraine, in the Argonne and in Champagne, obliges the Germans to dispose their forces along the arc of an enormous circle reaching from Verdun to Paris. If they continue to transfer units uninterruptedly towards the west, a moment may arrive when their communications will run almost exclusively through Belgium.

Our occupation of the Hauts de Meuse, and in conjunction with the presence of the First and Second Armies in Lorraine, enables us to take up dispositions which will be at all times *covered and supported on the right, and which in their general trend will face north-north-west.*

We can start from this base with the hope of accomplishing—this time on better ground and probably under better conditions—the rupture which we formerly attempted facing north-east and debouching from the Meuse.

It would seem that at the present moment we could envisage as the ulti-



mate points to be reached by our armies of the centre the following: The Seine and the Aube (from Bray-sur-Seine to Arcis-sur-Aube) for the Fifth Army and the Detachment of the Fourth Army; the Marne (from Vitry to Bar-le-Duc) for the main body of the Fourth Army; the region north of Bar-le-Duc for the Third Army.

A strong body of cavalry established from Ramerupt to Vitry-le-François would form the liaison between the two groups of armies.

On the extreme left, the Sixth Army would take its place as part of the garrison of Paris, while the British Army, moving around Paris by the north and the east, would establish itself behind the lower Seine.

On the right, the group of reserve divisions could either remain on the Hauts de Meuse or else fall back to the region of Commercy, joining up with Toul and with the armies of Lorraine.

In this case, the Third Army would establish itself south of the Ornain to the east of the Fourth Army; but it would seem to be advantageous, as far as it may be possible, to keep our right well to the north, in order to force the Germans to dispose themselves along the arc of a circle, and thus weaken them.

In other words, the Third Army, established in the region Verdun-Bar-le-Duc, would become the pivot of a general movement.

Although it is impossible to be precise upon this point, the following can be indicated as the successive steps to be carried out with a view to enabling us either to achieve a partial tactical success or to execute a general resumption of the offensive:

Fifth Army (less 2 corps sent to Paris)	Detachment of the Fourth Army	Cavalry Corps	Main Body of the Fourth Army	Third Army
Laon	Château-Porcien		Attigny	Montfaucon
Soissons	Bourgogne		Monthois	Varennes
Château-Thierry	Epernay	Suippes	Valmy	Dombasles-en-Argonne
La Ferté-Gaucher	Vertus	Châlons	Dommartin	Souilly
Provins	Fère-Champenoise	Vitry	Heiltz-le-Maurupt	Vaubecourt
Behind the Seine	Behind the Aube	Between the Aube and the Marne	Behind the Ornain	Region of Bar-le-Duc

The zones to be allotted in accordance with the movements indicated above might be:

Between the Fourth and Fifth Armies: The main road from Villers-Cotterêts to Meaux and Paris (the main road from Villers-Cotterêts through Nanteuil being reserved for the corps of the Fifth Army that are to be sent to Paris).

Between the Fifth Army and the Detachment of the Fourth Army: Craonne, Dormans, Montmirail, Nogent-sur-Seine.

Between the Detachment of the Fourth Army and the Cavalry Corps: Beine, Vertus, Fère-Champenoise, Arcis-sur-Aube.

Between the Cavalry Corps and the Fourth Army: Suippes and Vitry.

Between the Fourth Army and the Third Army: Sainte-Menehould, Revigny-aux-Vaches.

As can be seen, the situation in which we now found ourselves led me to abandon the manœuvre against the enemy's outer wing and to revert to the conception of an offensive action whose object would be to separate this wing from the rest of his line of battle.

This decision furnishes the explanation of all the orders given on August 30th and the days following, up to the moment when the Germans, contrary to all expectations, swung aside from Paris and made it possible for me to return to my conception of August 25th, which had in view the constitution of a force to outflank the enemy's marching wing.

Thus when, on returning that evening from the headquarters of the Third Army at Varennes, I learned that Sir John French had communicated his desire to bring his troops back behind the Seine in order to re-organize them in the zone Mantes-Poissy-Saint-Germain, I informed him that I accepted his proposal with the sole condition that he make his movement by passing first to the east of Paris, that is to say, behind the Marne, between Meaux and Neuilly-sur-Marne, and that he then move to the westward by circling Paris on the south.

Paris was indicated as the general direction of retirement for the Sixth Army, and General d'Amade, who had informed me that his territorial divisions were quite incapable of keeping the field any longer, was assigned Rouen as the line of his retreat.

The Fifth Army received orders to break off its action and to fall back behind the Serre, sending one army corps to Paris—a part by railway and a part by march route.

Foch's detachment, after a very hard day, had reached the left bank of the Aisne during the evening, its advanced guards alone remaining on the right bank.

Early in the afternoon of the 30th, I went to see General Ruffey at Varennes, as I had intended to do. I found him in a state which proved that all which had been reported to me was literally true. He was in a high condition of nervousness, giving vent to bitter reproaches against the majority of his subordinates, especially against General de Lartigue, and above all against General de Trentinian, who, he said, had caused his division to be massacred at Ethe, had lost a part of his artillery and had proved himself wholly useless as a divisional commander. His excited way of talking made me feel that it was impossible to take what

he said seriously. Indeed, after having asserted the day before that the IV Corps was indispensable for meeting the threat of an imminent attack, the commander of the Third Army now declared that the enemy no longer showed any activity and that he was about to push the IV Corps forward.

Under these conditions, I judged it imprudent to leave General Ruffey any longer in command of his army, and I directed him to hand it over to General Sarraill.<sup>18</sup> I notified General Grossetti at the same time that I was appointing him to the command of the 42nd Division; this he joined immediately, while Colonel Leboucq took up the duties of chief of staff of the army.

On leaving Varennes, I went to Monthois to see General de Langle. If I had been painfully impressed by the state of mind which was evinced by the commander of the Third Army, I was now struck by the energetic attitude of the commander of the Fourth—his calm deliberation, his complete mastery of himself. In the morning de Langle had informed me that he could not continue his retirement without doing injury to the morale of his troops, who asked nothing better than to go on fighting, and he announced that he planned to start from his present positions and resume the offensive towards the north. In the course of our interview that afternoon I authorized him to undertake this action in conjunction with the one which the Third Army was preparing to the north-west of Nouart. My idea was that this attack would help to relieve the pressure on General Foch, whose detachment was engaged against very important forces on the left of the Fourth Army.

But the direction of our armies was not the only matter which pre-occupied me at this moment. There was the question of Paris.

General Gallieni had already telephoned to Vitry in the morning to explain the situation obtaining in the entrenched camp of Paris and to ask that active troops be placed at his disposal for the defence of the Capital. I answered him that my intention was to send the Sixth Army to Paris. It was true that this Army was largely composed of reserve formations, but a corps taken from the Fifth Army would soon be added to them.

Shortly after my departure for Varennes, Colonel Pénelon, belonging to the military household of the President and liaison officer between the Government and myself, arrived at Vitry, charged by M. Millerand to draw my attention to the necessity of assigning to the entrenched

<sup>18</sup> General Ruffey accepted this decision without any apparent regret. He dined that same evening at my table at Vitry-le-François.

camp of Paris a sufficient number of active troops. He was furthermore instructed to ask my opinion regarding the transfer of the seat of government to Bordeaux.

On reaching my headquarters I received a telephone call from M. Millerand. After informing him of the situation and telling him of my decision to have our forces fall back, I gave him to understand that I considered Paris to be very seriously menaced and that in order to facilitate its defence and leave our armies perfectly free to manœuvre, it seemed to me advantageous to remove the Government to Bordeaux. I advised him that orders had been given to the Fifth Army to send to Paris the next day an army corps composed of two divisions. I also informed him that I had decided to take certain units from the First and Second Armies in order to reinforce our left.

Our Russian Allies now brought me a new source of anxiety, to be added to those which had already filled this heavy day. I have already mentioned several times the great interest with which I followed the Russian operations. The favourable news we had received up to this time caused me to hope that the Germans would soon be obliged to send to the East a part of the forces which were now engaged against us; indeed, this constituted one of the principal reasons I had for trying to hold out as long as possible; estimating as I did that within a short time the German impetus on our front would be exhausted. But during the middle of the night we learned from a German radio message, intercepted at Belfort, that "the success of the battle of Tannenberg is more complete than at first it was thought to be. Three Russian army corps have been completely destroyed and two corps commanders have been taken, along with 70,000 prisoners; parts of the VI and I Corps are in flight; the Russian Second Army no longer exists."

I could not decide how much credence was to be given to this news, but I found it impossible to shake off the influence of a dark presentiment.

And yet, in spite of this catastrophe, the Russians had rendered us exactly the service I had expected of them; for, as I learned the next morning, at the very moment that this bad news arrived from Tannenberg, two German army corps were leaving our front on their way to East Prussia.

*August 31st.* As so often happens in war, the next morning the general situation did not appear so bad as it had seemed during the whole of the preceding day. First, an intercepted German radio brought us an indication that the enemy forces engaged on the 29th against our Fifth Army had met with a veritable defeat. "Conceal from the troops our

repulse on the left flank," said this message. But by far the most important news was that which arrived from Belgium, reporting the movement of German troop trains from the west to the east and stating that their passage through Berlin had been confirmed. Thirty-two trains had been counted, moving evidently in the direction of Russia. Thus, there could be no doubt that the reaction of the Russian offensive was beginning to make itself felt on the French front, and that the pressure of the enemy upon our forces must inevitably diminish.

On learning this favourable news, I thought it useful to urge upon all our commanders the necessity of yielding ground only foot by foot and even then only when absolutely forced to do so. To the Sixth Army I recommended that no retirement be made unless directly pressed by the enemy and that all retrograde movements be halted as soon as it became certain that our units were not in danger of being caught by superior forces. To Lanrezac I made the same recommendation, at the same time directing him to hold the XVIII Corps in readiness to be sent to Paris, as decided upon the day before; I also ordered him to give his troops all the rest possible.

I made the most pressing representations to Sir John French. I explained to him that by reason of the information I had just received, I had given orders to the Fifth and Sixth Armies to fall back only when severely pressed by the enemy; they could not fulfil this task if any gap occurred between them and I, therefore, urged him "not to withdraw the British Army unless we ourselves are obliged to fall back" and I begged that at least he "handle his rear-guards in such fashion as to prevent the enemy from getting the impression that a distinct movement in retreat is under way and that a gap exists between our Fifth and Sixth Armies."

I received Sir John's reply during the evening. It stated that in conformity with the wish I had expressed, the British Army would retire the next morning only to the line Fontaine-des-Corps-Nuds—Nanteuville-Haudouin—Betz, and it would hold this line as long as the Fifth and Sixth Armies continued to occupy their present position (both of these armies were a full day's march in front of the line indicated by Sir John French). The British Commander added, "if these two French armies fall back, the British Army will follow the movement; it cannot make any advance until it has been reorganized and its ranks filled up."

This was certainly not the reply I had hoped for, since this systematic retirement of the British line, always one day's march in our rear, would continue to leave the left flank of the Fifth Army uncovered.



Now, that very morning, an intercepted German radio had informed us that a German cavalry corps had succeeded in crossing the Oise by the bridge at Bailly, which had been left intact by the British detachment charged with destroying it. This cavalry force was reported to be marching on Soissons, that is to say, towards the rear of the Fifth Army; and it appeared to be followed by two army corps. What I had asked the British to do was to intervene against this manœuvre, which risked transforming the retreat of the Fifth Army into a disaster, for its communications would be cut. I have just related the form which that evening Field Marshal French's refusal to this request had taken. I thus remained much disturbed concerning Lanrezac's fate, until the news came that, thanks to precautions taken by him, the German cavalry corps had been prevented from entering the zone of march of our columns.

In the midst of my anxiety concerning the fate of the Fifth Army, I was obliged to take an important decision affecting our forces in the centre. It will be remembered that the day before, while at his headquarters, I had authorized General de Langle to attack the enemy during the day of the 31st. He was to combine his action with an offensive by the Third Army and by Foch's detachment along both banks of the Aisne. However, whilst the Fourth Army declared itself ready to begin this attack the next day, General Foch, whose personal opinion I had requested, informed me that he was very hard pressed and that he would have much difficulty in holding firm against the enemy opposed to him. The reasons he gave were the peculiarities offered by the ground in Champagne, where no good points of support existed, the worn-out condition of his troops, and the weakness of the IX Corps in artillery. Under these conditions, it seemed to me that a continuation of the Fourth Army's offensive might lead to creating between this army and Foch's detachment a gap similar to that which the retreat of the British had just produced on the left wing of the Fifth Army. During the evening, therefore, I decided to stop the fighting in the Third and Fourth Armies, and directed them to fall back to the line Rheims-Vouziers. In fact, this was the beginning of the general retirement of our whole front upon which I had determined the day before.

Still other reasons for anxiety now poured in, this time from Paris. M. Messimy, who had just received the command of a unit at the front, passed through G.H.Q., and I invited him to luncheon. He brought me news of what was going on in the Capital. The evacuations already effected and the announcement of the Government's departure had brought about a wave of pessimism; it was even thought that there

were men in the Cabinet willing to make peace at any price. The fact that the withdrawal of German troops from our front would probably lessen the tension induced me, therefore, to telegraph the Minister of War that the situation was such as to make me believe that the departure of the Government for Bordeaux could be delayed, at least until September 2nd. I did this in the hope of bringing about a little calm and inspiring some hope in Paris circles.

*September 1st.* The information received on the 30th regarding the crossing of the Oise above Compiègne by German forces had been communicated to General Maunoury. The conclusion he drew from it was that the German First Army, pushing out cavalry divisions in front, was turning away from Paris and was moving in an easterly direction, contenting itself with masking the Sixth Army by a portion of its forces—those debouching from the region Saint-Just-Montdidier. With a clearness of vision which was greatly to his credit, Maunoury at once saw the danger that threatened the Fifth Army, and, realizing that his own army, although as yet scarcely constituted, had an important rôle to play in this juncture, he proposed that he should make an attack on September 1st, in the direction of Clermont and facing north-east.

Maunoury's appreciation of the situation corresponded exactly with the instructions I had given him on the 27th, when I informed him that the resumption of the offensive would be started by an attack of his army in an approximate north-easterly direction. But the situation taken as a whole had now become modified. For ever since the 30th of August I had been obliged to renounce all thought of delivering a general battle under the conditions I had envisaged on the 25th, and in the new plan I had conceived the mission of the Sixth Army was to cover Paris. But it must avoid any repulse; for, under present conditions, this would have particularly serious consequences, since Maunoury's forces might thus be driven far away from the entrenched camp of Paris, and likewise become separated from the British Army.

For this reason, after expressing my satisfaction at his clear comprehension of the situation, I informed General Maunoury on the morning of September 1st of his new mission, which was to fall back upon the Capital, and, from that moment on, keep in close touch with the Military Governor of Paris.

It will thus be seen that, on the morning of September 1st, I considered that the defence of Paris was to be the business of Maunoury's army, reinforced by one active corps, my calculation being that the aggregate of the forces told off for this duty would amount to two active

army corps and five reserve divisions. The active units would constitute the mobile defence, and these could be called upon to participate in field operations alongside our other armies.<sup>19</sup>

Turning now to the British, in spite of the small success that had marked my efforts with Sir John French, I was persuaded that their situation would improve much more quickly than they now believed, and I did not at all despair of seeing them participate in the manœuvre which had commenced to shape itself in my mind.

The direction taken by the extreme right columns of the enemy seemed to carry them somewhat away from Paris; it, therefore, became possible to contemplate a manœuvre which would combine in one action the main forces composing our field armies and the troops charged with the defence of the Capital; there also presented itself the eventuality of being able to make use of the entrenched camp of Paris as a point of support for the manœuvre.

In any case, if the Germans avoided Paris—and the change in the direction of their columns seemed to indicate this intention—it was essential that the garrison assigned to the city's defence be placed directly under my orders. For this reason I asked the Minister of War to give me authority over the entrenched camp of Paris, in order "to enable me, if the case arises, to employ the mobile part of the garrison in field operations."<sup>20</sup>

Assembling all the information that we had on the morning of September 1st, the German armies on that day appeared to be located as follows:

*The First Army*, under the orders of General von Kluck, composed of four active corps and one reserve corps, had reached the region just south of Compiègne.

*The Second Army*, commanded by General von Bülow, composed of three active corps and two reserve corps had reached the region of Laon.

*The Third Army*, under the orders of General von Hausen, composed of two active corps and one reserve corps, had crossed the Aisne between Château-Porcien and Attigny.

<sup>19</sup> The Fifth Army had been ordered to send the XVIII Corps to Paris, but the movement of these troops had been rendered impossible by the advance of the German cavalry towards Soissons. I, therefore, decided to replace this corps by the IV Corps, taken from the Third Army, to move in time to reach Paris on September 3rd and 4th. The two divisions of this corps, with one division of the VII Corps and the 45th Division, would bring the active elements charged with the defence of Paris up to four divisions.

<sup>20</sup> Telegram No. 3168 to the Minister of War, September 1st, 9.05 a.m.

*The Fourth and Fifth Armies*, commanded respectively by the Duke of Württemberg and the Crown Prince of Germany, consisting of six active corps and four reserve corps, were in contact with our armies between Verdun and Viviers.

*The Sixth and Seventh Armies*, composed of six active corps, reinforced by numerous reserve and ersatz formations, were entrenched in front of our right from the outskirts of Nancy to the advanced works of Belfort. They were commanded by Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria and General von Hoerigen.<sup>21</sup>

In the presence of the enemy's wide encircling movement against our left, it was evident that we could not accept battle immediately. The engagement of one of our armies would bring on that of all our forces. The Fifth Army would find itself in a situation which the advance of the German First Army, aided by the incursion of the German Cavalry Corps, would render extremely perilous. The slightest check would run the risk of becoming transformed into an irremediable defeat. Besides this, our troops had been marching and fighting continuously; they were worn out and greatly needed to have their ranks filled up.

As I have already explained, our situation in the Coalition imposed upon us the duty of holding out as long as possible, while keeping the maximum number of German forces occupied in front of us and wearing them down by attacks undertaken upon every favourable occasion; but we had to avoid any decisive engagement as long as we did not hold enough trumps in our hand to give us a distinct chance of success.

This was the situation as it presented itself to me towards 9.30 a.m. of September 1st, when I was about to leave Vitry-le-François for Bar-sur-Aube, at which place I had decided to establish my headquarters.

I arrived about 11 a.m., and while my office was being installed in the boys' school, I proceeded to study with my collaborators the various solutions which the situation presented. Opinions were greatly divided. Berthelot proposed to send three army corps to our left; but it was not difficult to convince him that this would require too much time and that the situation was too pressing to contemplate any such manœuvre.

After much thought, I came to the conclusion that the most advantageous solution offered by the present state of our affairs would consist in our moving our forces sufficiently far to the rear to make sure that we could avoid any general action engaged under unfavourable conditions. This, in fact, was the conception present in my mind on August 30th

<sup>21</sup> German order of battle, drawn up the evening of August 31st by the Intelligence Bureau of G.H.Q.

and which I had caused to be set down in Colonel Pont's memorandum. Our entire line was to pivot on its right and fall back before the out-flanking movement effected by the enemy against our left wing. In this way, the Fifth Army and the British Army might escape the menace of envelopment; once this first point achieved, the whole of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies would resume the offensive.

If this movement was to be possible, it was essential that the Third Army be solidly established, for it would serve as the pivot. It was for this reason that Colonel Pont, chief of the Operations Bureau, insisted that the Third Army, already weakened by the detachment of one of its corps to Paris, be now reinforced. I considered that the reserve divisions of this army actually in place on the Hauts-de-Meuse could abandon this position, when the moment arrived, and participate in the general offensive. Moreover, I proposed to withdraw units from the First and Second Armies up to the extreme limit of safety; indeed, on our right the enemy displayed no activity whatever, and our situation there had become singularly improved.

In drawing up this plan, I had prescribed certain limits for the movement in retreat; but I did not expect that these limits would necessarily be reached; the idea was to have at all times everything in readiness for seizing any favourable opportunity which might arise. Since on this date, September 1st, it appeared necessary for us to have ample room and to seek a solid line of departure for the contemplated offensive, I prescribed as the limit of our retreat the Aube and the Seine. I thought that in this way our line could be so established as to ensure for its left the co-operation of the British Army and of the mobile forces belonging to the entrenched camp of Paris. By creating a sort of pocket, running through Verdun, Bar-le-Duc, Arcis-sur-Aube, Nogent-sur-Seine, and the Paris forts, we would be creating a favourable strategic situation.

These ideas constituted the basis of General Instructions No. 4, which I caused to be drawn up at Bar-sur-Aube early in the afternoon of September 1st and despatched to our left wing armies, to the British Army, and to the Military Governor of Paris.

The Fifth Army continued to preoccupy my thoughts during the whole forenoon of September 1st. The menace to its left flank presented by the German cavalry required me to take some measure for its protection. This led me to constitute a new cavalry corps and send it to Lanrezac's left. I placed this force under the orders of General Conneau, whom I directed to report immediately to G.H.Q. Just as he arrived at Bar-sur-Aube, I learned with much satisfaction that the Fifth Army



had been able to cross the Aisne without opposition, and that the German cavalry had been prevented from compromising the retirement of the reserve divisions to the south of the Saint-Gobain Forest. But it had been reported to me that this retirement had been effected only very slowly, because of the blocked condition of the roads and the excessive fatigue of the troops, augmented as it was by the burning heat.

Although the Fifth Army had succeeded in reaching the country between the Aisne and the Vesle, my fears of seeing it enveloped were revived by information arriving during the evening, and which made me most anxious to see Conneau's corps in place as soon as possible: for reconnaissances by both the French and British air forces reported the enemy columns to be marching in a south-south-easterly direction. In addition, information of the very highest importance reached me towards the close of the evening from the V Corps. A German officer had been wounded in a motor-car that day and taken prisoner near Coucy-le-Château. A map was found on him containing indications regarding the movement of the German First Army, and showing in detail the objectives which the various corps of this army were expected to reach. The general trend of these movements made it perfectly clear that von Kluck's whole army had crossed the Oise and was inclining the general direction of its march towards the south-east.

Although the enemy's intention, as revealed by this concordance of information, appeared to menace Lanrezac's army, it indicated, on the other hand, and quite clearly, that von Kluck was now no longer marching against Paris. Nothing could be more advantageous to us. For if this movement continued, its effect would be to place our Sixth Army in an analogous position to that which on August 25th I had contemplated for it in order to engage a battle on a front running from Amiens through Laon to Verdun. It can be imagined with what intense interest we now bent ourselves to following von Kluck's movements.

At almost the same moment that this important information arrived, I received from M. Millerand the following letter:

Sept. 1st, 1914.

"My dear General,

I would have liked to talk with you over the direct wire concerning the enclosed note. It was drawn up in my presence by Field Marshal Sir John French at the end of a conference lasting more than two hours, following upon his arrival today in Paris.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> That same day the Field Marshal had had an interview at the British Embassy in Paris with Lord Kitchener, who had arrived during the morning from London. M. Viviani and M. Millerand were present at this conference.

I do not wish to infringe in any way upon your liberty of action, for that, as well as your responsibility, must continue to be complete; but I feel I should tell you that the Government is unanimous in wishing that you could find a way to accept Sir John French's proposition. In the first place, it appears to be advantageous for the defence of Paris; in the second place, your acceptance would have the result of bringing the two headquarters closer together and paving the way for a more intimate co-operation between the two commanders. I hesitate to insist. You know my sentiments. It is for you to weigh the matter and decide.

Believe me, dear General, affectionately and devotedly yours,

MILLERAND.

P.S. If you accept, it is needless for me to point out how urgent it is to inform Sir John French and to have the works started.

The following were the propositions made by Sir John French and transmitted to me by the Minister of War:

PARIS. Sept. 1st, 1914.

It seems to me that the present situation demands that we decide upon a plan, thoroughly understood by all and in the carrying out of which all can co-operate.

I would prefer to see a line of defence chosen which would run along the river Marne and stretch a few miles to the west and north-west of Paris. The length of this line should be determined by the effectives available for occupying it; these should be sufficient in density and depth to enable both local and general counter-attacks to be made.

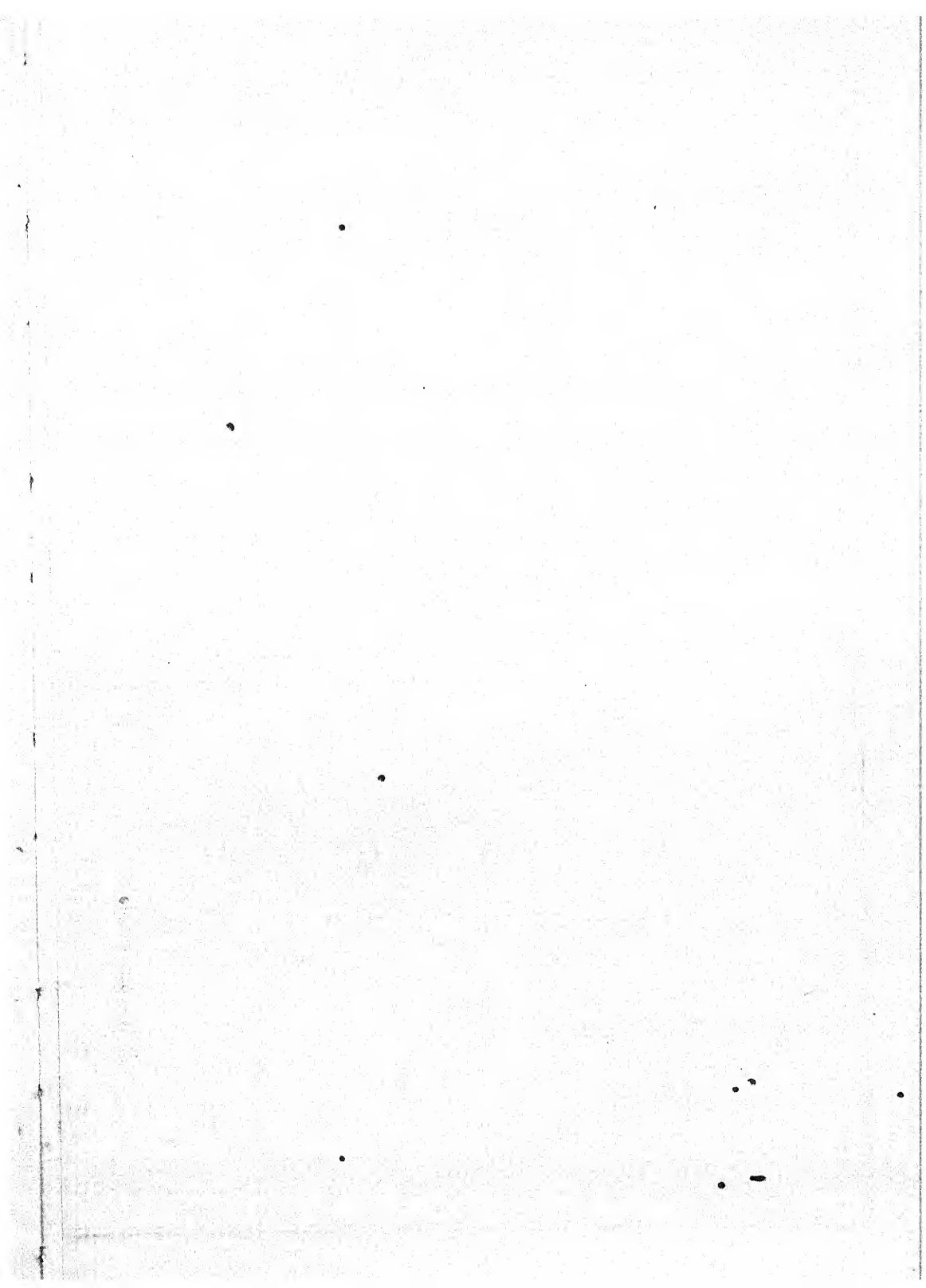
I would prefer that the elements intended for a general counter-attack be concentrated behind the left flank and made as strong as possible.

If a position of this kind is prepared, I am ready to hold my present line—that is to say, at Nanteuil and to the east and west of this place—for as long a time as the situation requires, provided always that I do not run the risk of seeing my flanks exposed to an attack.

I am ready to do everything in my power to co-operate in this plan, but whatever may be the circumstances, in view of the condition of inferiority in which the British Army now finds itself, I cannot place it in a situation where it would be liable to an attack by superior forces, unless it is certain to be supported and extricated.

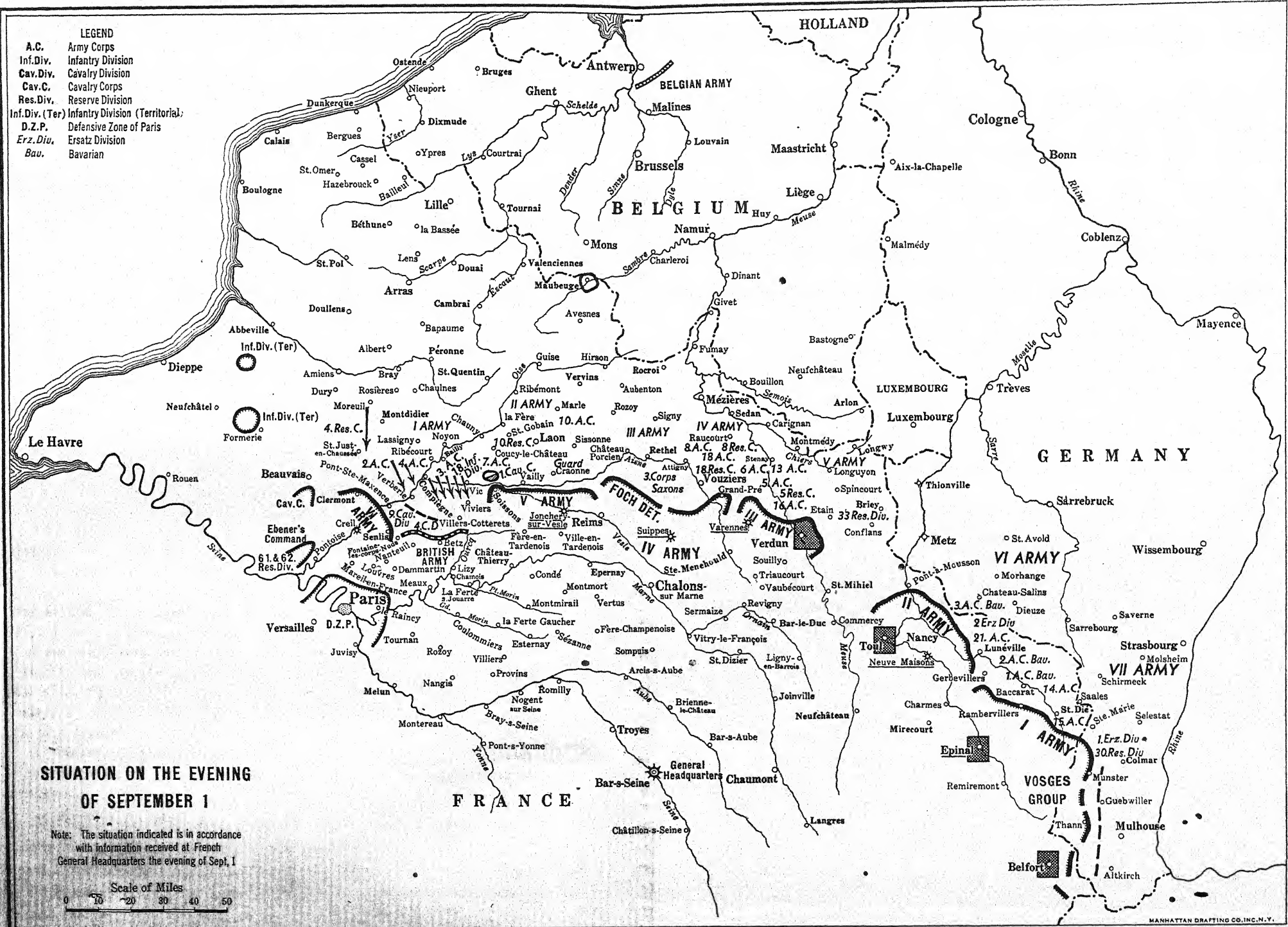
If this plan is to be accepted, not a moment should be lost in beginning the construction of defences for the position, using all the resources at our command.

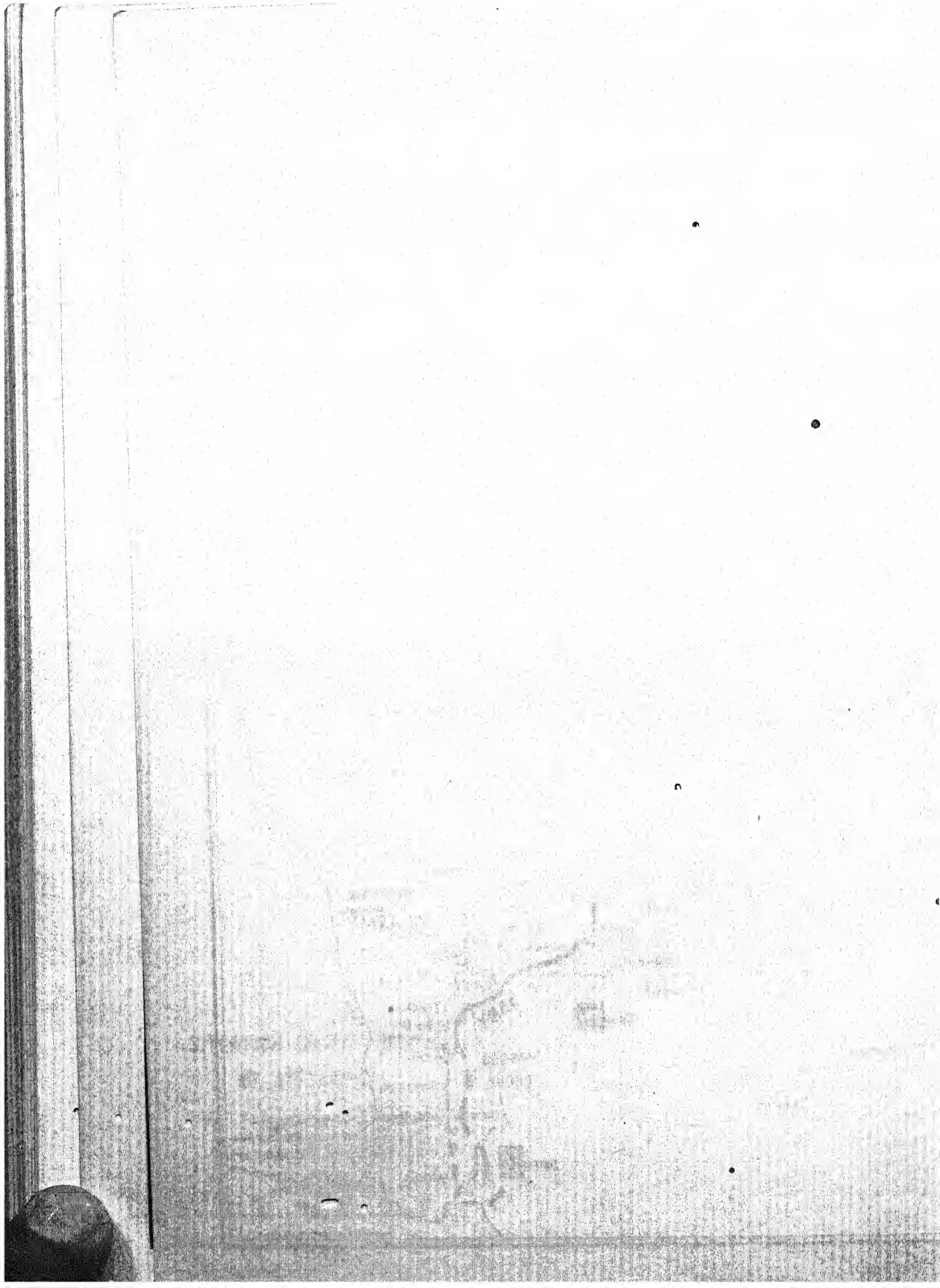
*September 2nd.* This proposition reached me after General Instructions No. 4 had been sent out. I could not permit it to change the solution I had already adopted, especially since news received from British Headquarters during the night of September 1st/2nd seriously diminished the possibility of action on the part of the British Army. In fact,



**LEGEND**

A.C. Army Corps  
 Inf.Div. Infantry Division  
 Cav.Div. Cavalry Division  
 Cav.C. Cavalry Corps  
 Res.Div. Reserve Division  
 Inf.Div. (Ter) Infantry Division (Territorial)  
 D.Z.P. Defensive Zone of Paris  
 Erz. Div. Ersatz Division  
 Bau. Bavarian







about 3 a.m. September 2nd the following telegram from the chief of the French Mission at British G.H.Q. arrived:

"British troops obliged to retreat; are falling back tonight to a line north and west of Nanteuil-le-Haudouin. Tomorrow, September 2nd, they will retire to Dammartin; September 3rd to the Marne."

To fight a defensive battle on the Marne was no solution. The course of this river offered an obstacle parallel to the general front of our armies only in the region of Châlons; both of our wings would be in the air, and the Germans could establish themselves in a defensive position on the north bank and be wholly free to treat the question of Verdun and of Paris at their leisure; we would be renouncing the enveloping form which little by little the French armies were taking in their retreat with their wings resting on the fortifications of Verdun and of Paris. Therefore, such a decision might have the most serious consequences. Moreover, the movement of our troops from the right wing towards the centre and left wing, then in course of execution, was not yet completed.<sup>23</sup> and I thought it best to invoke this reason, viz., the concentration I was making with a view to battle, in refusing Sir John French's suggestion. I chose it so as not to excite his susceptibilities, on the one hand, and, on the other, in order not to reveal as yet the definite form which I proposed to give to my manœuvre.

It may be here remarked, moreover, that the river Marne played only a minor rôle in the battle. The "Victory of the Marne" was a phrase decided upon by the French High Command after the event, because the action in general took place in the valley of the Marne and its tributaries (the Ourcq, the Grand Morin, the Petit Morin and the Ornain), and this seemed the best way of blending into one term the theatre of the battle.

After some reflection I decided that I could not allow Sir John French's proposals to cause any modification in the orders already given, whose effect would be to place our troops in a position permitting them to take the offensive at a moment's notice. I still considered that, unless some favourable event intervened, the line on which to make our halt would lie between the Seine and the Aube; here we would face about and attack. If the British were disposed to furnish an efficacious co-operation,

<sup>23</sup> The 55th and 56th Reserve Divisions and the IV Army Corps, taken from the Third Army and to be sent to the Sixth; one division of the IX Corps, coming from the Second Army and destined for Foch's Detachment; the XXI Corps, taken from the First Army and sent to the Sixth; the XV Corps, coming from the Second Army and destined for the Third; three divisions of cavalry, taken from the First and Second Armies to form a cavalry corps and to be placed between Lanrezac and French.

their most useful rôle would be in helping to defend Paris, their front running along the Seine between Melun and Juvisy.

It was in this sense that I answered both the Minister of War and Sir John French on the morning of September 2nd.

However, the question of the defence of the Capital continued to cause me much anxiety. At noon Gallieni had had a long conversation by telephone with General Pellé, in which he drew my attention to the fact that the entrenched camp of Paris was wholly incapable of providing for its own defence. "If General Maunoury cannot hold out," he said, "we are in no condition to resist." And from this he went on to conclude that the field armies must come to his aid for the defence of the north and east fronts. This situation had not escaped me, and on the morning of September 1st, a few hours before this telephonic conversation, I had informed the Minister of War that I thought the Government should quit the Capital without delay.

It was this reason also which caused me to have General Gallieni informed, during the morning of the same day, that I considered it indispensable for the troops to occupy their defence positions as quickly as possible, the important thing being for them to reach Paris before the enemy. I was also most anxious not to have any delay in the retirement of the Sixth Army. Its movement was to co-ordinate that prescribed for the Third and Fourth Armies, and which was being executed without any opposition on the part of the enemy. I had especially recommended to the various army commanders to explain to all ranks that this was not a forced retreat, but a movement made in preparation for operations to be undertaken later on.

The night of September 1st/2nd brought us confirmation of the fact that German troops were moving towards Russia. Units of the VII, IX and III Corps had been entrained in Belgium with the Eastern front as their destination.

Although on the previous day the German First Army seemed to have had the intention of avoiding Paris, information which arrived on the morning of September 2nd appeared to indicate that von Kluck was, in fact, moving towards the Capital. I had no illusions as to the fate of the city if the enemy attacked it.

On the other hand, the withdrawal of troops from our front, which the enemy had been forced to make to reinforce his forces on his eastern frontier, seemed to constitute a circumstance so favourable that I anxiously asked myself if I ought not to take advantage of it and promptly undertake an offensive. The question, therefore, arose as to whether it was ad-

visible to continue our retreat to the line I had fixed the day before as the base from which our new forward movement would start. Taken all in all, our retirement had left our troops very nearly intact up to the present. The great battle which was to decide the fate of the war had not yet been fought; there had taken place, so far, only partial engagements; these, in some cases had turned out to our advantage, in others to our disadvantage. But by continuing this retreat indefinitely, we would end by giving the appearance of a beaten army before even any decisive action had been fought. In addition to all this, the retirement was delivering a large portion of our territory into the hands of the enemy, and it was my duty to reduce this painful sacrifice to its narrowest limits. And so, I asked myself, was it possible to hasten the date for resuming a general offensive?

At my headquarters opinions on this question were divided. The Operations Bureau and its chief were partisans of making every effort to resume the forward movement as soon as possible. Berthelot, on the contrary, favored a retirement behind the Seine. The troops, he held, were so worn out by the long retreat which had never ceased since the Sambre, that they were incapable of making any effort. Indeed, General de Langle had sent his chief of staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Dessens, to inform me that his army was greatly in need of a rest before undertaking any new operation whatever. The men of his XII Corps, especially, were so worn out that a part of the infantry would have to be moved by rail. These considerations led Berthelot to believe that the troops should be established behind the protection of some obstacle, such as the Seine, where they would be safe from pressure by the enemy and could get a breathing spell before delivering a battle on which depended the fate of the country.

Bélin thought that our primary duty was to keep ourselves alive, reserving our strength for such time as the Russians could make their action felt more completely; he believed that this prudent attitude constituted the best means of upsetting the German plan, which unquestionably had in view the destruction of the French Army at the earliest possible moment.

After much reflection, I decided that Bélin's advice was wise: the thing to do above all was to hold out. The state of our men, moreover, as reported by army commanders, gave additional reason for inclining to this solution.

We now learned that the columns of the German Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies were marching from the region of Rethel towards the

south. This mass, composed of at least a dozen army corps, most likely would soon encounter the worn-out troops of Foch, Sarraill and de Langle, which would find themselves, moreover, in a situation of marked numerical inferiority. Did all this present a combination of circumstances favourable for fighting a decisive battle? Certainly not.

I resolved to fall back again and establish my front several days' march in rear of where it now stood. This solution would offer another advantage, for it would permit me to modify still further the distribution of my forces, by moving troops from the First and Second Armies to my centre and left wing.

The evening of September 2nd I sent out a general order to the Army, stating that the retirement now being effected had for its object to close up and re-arrange our forces, with a view to preparing a new offensive, which had every chance of succeeding. I added that I reserved to myself the right to choose the moment for starting it, but I would probably give the signal in a few days. Meanwhile, ranks must be filled up, officers and non-commissioned officers appointed, and measures of the utmost severity taken to ensure that the retirement be accomplished in perfect order. I also indicated to army commanders the general lines of my plan, which, in fact, was only a continuation of the manœuvre contemplated in General Instructions No. 4 of the preceding day. What it was proposed to do, I told them, was to relieve our forces from the enemy's pressure by establishing them on the general line Pont-sur-Yonne, Nogent-sur-Seine, Arcis-sur-Aube, Brienne-le-Château, Joinville, reinforce the army of the centre by two army corps taken from the two armies of the right wing, and then pass to the offensive. In regard to the garrison of Paris, I already anticipated that its function would be to act in the direction of Meaux, and I advised Gallieni to that effect.

Much interesting information arrived from the Capital during the afternoon of September 2nd. In the first place the Government had decided to leave Paris and install themselves at Bordeaux. Then, towards midnight, I received a letter from the Military Governor in which he reminded me with much insistence that the city would be wholly incapable of offering any resistance unless its garrison were reinforced by at least three active army corps. I already knew that. Neither the forts, which dated from the time when I was a young lieutenant of engineers, nor the barricades which had been hastily erected, were capable of halting the enemy. But this was not the way I envisaged the defence of the Capital: it must be accomplished by the mobile defence forces actively co-operating in the general operations, in the direction of Meaux,

as I had already ordered they should do, in a combined thrust against the enemy's outer flank. This was quite different from the conception which General Gallieni appeared to have.

Speaking of Gallieni, I wish to record here the very great respect in which I hold his memory. During all this tragic period, as our correspondence at the time will show, he was my devoted and clear-sighted collaborator, and he brought to his work the honest straightforwardness of the thorough soldier that he was.

To conclude the recital of the events of September 2nd, I should add that the French Foreign Office sent us news which for two days we had dreaded to receive: the Russians had met with a grave repulse in East Prussia, which the Imperial Headquarters seemed very anxious to conceal. On the other hand, in Galicia a great victory over the Austrians was reported by our Allies. From Servia came the news that, following their successes on the slopes of the Tser, the Servians had decided to take the offensive in Syrmia early in September.

*September 3rd.* On the morning of September 3rd the situation on our left seemed less unfavourable than there had been reason to anticipate. The Sixth Army had been able to withdraw without serious difficulty; the British had succeeded in establishing themselves on the front Dammartin-Saint-Soupplets-Etrépilly, likewise without being pressed; it was even to be hoped, according to Gallieni's opinion, that they would not cross the Marne.

One point still remained obscure. On September 1st, the German First Army, moving south-south-east, had reached with its right corps Saint-Just-en-Chaussée, and, with its remaining corps, the front Verberie-Vivières and the country west of Soissons. However, on the 2nd some of von Kluck's corps had again seemed to be moving towards the south-west. What conclusion was to be drawn from this? Yes or no, would Paris be attacked? Another point was that we had no news as to the movements of the German Second Army.

The indecision of the enemy's movements, the absence of all energy in his pursuit, the persistence of information reporting the transport of his troops from the Western front towards Russia, all impressed themselves forcibly upon my mind, seeming, as they did, to constitute a combination of circumstances favourable to the undertaking of that general offensive which dominated all my thoughts. In spite of the decision I had taken the day before, I wished to have accurate information as to the physical and moral condition of Foch's troops, which evidently would be called upon to play an important rôle in our attack. I decided to consult him.



At the same time, and always in anticipation of the attack I was preparing and which would exact of everybody, commanders and troops alike, the maximum of will-power and tenacity, I passed in mental review all the chiefs who would be called upon to play a decisive part in the action. The day before, in a general order to the army, I had pointed out that the fate of our country depended upon the success of the battle we were about to engage, and that the last ounce of energy was required from everyone if victory was to be ensured. During the preceding days, as replies came in to the inquiries I had set on foot, I had removed a considerable number of generals who had proved themselves unequal to their tasks, replacing them by officers who had given evidence of possessing the required firmness of character and professional ability.

In this particular matter there remained a grave question which I had not as yet decided—I mean the command of the Fifth Army. Ever since the battle of Guise—where, it will be remembered, I had found General Lanrezac fully master of himself, although the day before I had been struck by the state of physical and moral depression in which I had seen him—ever since this battle the commander of the Fifth Army had never ceased to discuss the orders given him and to raise objections to everything. His physical fatigue had intensified a tendency to criticize, which had always been one of the marked characteristics of his nature. He had become hesitating and timorous. Under the effects of his weakening authority, the staff of the Fifth Army had become profoundly shaken, while his unpleasant personal relations with Sir John French had compromised the co-operation of the British Army with our own.

I could not help thinking of Lanrezac's brilliant career in time of peace. When I commanded the 6th Division he was under me as a Colonel, and just as had been the case with all the men who had been his pupils, I had been charmed by his brilliancy and keen intelligence. At map exercises he had always displayed a marvellous lucidity and accuracy, as well as judgment and common sense. It was precisely because I had the highest opinion of his intelligence that I had been the artisan of his military fortunes, and it was due to me that he now found himself at the head of that one of our armies which was the most difficult and delicate to command.

But, in comparing what I had expected of him before this war broke out with the way he had acted in the presence of its stern realities, I was obliged to conclude, in spite of the genuine feeling I had for him, that his responsibilities had overwhelmed him. Brilliant critic that he

was of operations in which he was not an actor, he had morally gone to pieces when faced by the hard circumstances which marked the opening of the campaign. You cannot make war except with men who have firm faith in the outcome, men who, by their own complete mastery of themselves know how to inspire the confidence of their subordinates and dominate events. Perhaps in a successful war Lanrezac might have accomplished marvels; under the difficult conditions which confronted us his presence at the head of the Fifth Army constituted a weakness; indeed, I might add that this conviction was shared by all who had come into contact with him during these dark and trying days.

What, then, was my duty? However painful it might be to me, however great my repugnance to remove from his command one of the most highly esteemed chiefs in all the service, I felt that another man had to be placed at the head of the Fifth Army, if I wished to start the new offensive with the conviction that I had done everything in my power to insure its success.<sup>24</sup>

Once having taken my decision, it was intensely painful to me to execute it, and every detail of those closing hours of the afternoon of September 3rd have remained graven in my memory; I felt it was my duty to act on my resolution, and yet I was afraid that at the last minute I would not have the courage to carry it through. In order, as it were, to place myself before a *fait accompli*, I made up my mind to send for Franchet d'Esperey, and ask him if he would accept the command of the Fifth Army; after this was done, I would see Lanrezac and announce my decision to him.

I had arranged a meeting with Franchet d'Esperey at a little farmhouse near Sézanne, where two roads meet. I met him there at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I started by saying to him, "The Fifth Army is not being handled in the way I desire—above all, in view of the coming offensive. I shall be obliged to replace Lanrezac. I have thought of you. Do you feel yourself up to commanding an army?"

"The same as another," replied the commander of the I Army Corps.

We then discussed the situation in his corps and in those on his flanks. When I asked him his views as to the possibility of a resumption of the offensive by the Fifth Army, he answered that he believed such an effort premature, considering the extreme fatigue of the men.

<sup>24</sup> It has been said, written and repeated that I had never pardoned Lanrezac for having broken off the fighting on the days following Charleroi and Guise. Nothing could be more false. Those decisions were taken with my full knowledge and consent. His decision after Charleroi was not only ratified by me, but it was the point of departure of the new manœuvre conceived on August 25th.

Our conversation lasted about half an hour. Franchet d'Esperey then left me to rejoin his headquarters, at which place it was understood that I would send him my orders. I then continued on my way to Sézanne where the headquarters of the Fifth Army were established in a school-house.

Lanrezac was in his office. I went in and remained there alone with him. Our talk was very short. "My friend," I said, "you know how I have always aided you and helped to advance you in your career. But you are used up, undecided; you will have to give up the command of the Fifth Army. I hate to tell you this, but I have to."

Lanrezac thought a moment and then answered: "General, you are right"; and contrary to what I expected, he seemed like a man relieved from an overwhelming burden, for his whole face literally brightened. I told him that I was going to order him to report to Gallieni and that I was sure he would render very great services in this position.

I then sent to his headquarters for Franchet d'Esperey, and while waiting for him to come walked up and down in the school-house yard. When the new commander of the Fifth Army arrived, I repeated to him my decision and then left Sézanne for my own headquarters.

It was about 8 p.m. when I got there. The answer to the question I had put to Foch in the morning awaited me, Captain André Tardieu having brought it. The General's reply was unequivocal: the organization of his army was not yet completed and its condition was such that he considered it premature to undertake any offensive operation for several days.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard, belonging to the staff of the Fourth Army, had been sent to G.H.Q. to ask authority in most formal fashion to have the infantry of the XII Corps transported by rail for one or two days' march, for it was literally incapable of further effort. This corps, under the able direction of General Roques, had given the best account of itself ever since the beginning of the campaign, but the men had now reached the extreme limit of human resistance. This request could not be refused and the railway transport department was charged with solving the difficult problem.

From the Sixth Army reports arrived stating that no engagement had taken place on its front and that it had been able to reach its new positions with difficulty—indeed, appearances indicated that there were no enemy troops facing it.

Returning now to Gallieni, it will be remembered that I had received a very disquieting letter from him during the night of September 2nd/3rd, in which he declared that it was impossible for him to defend

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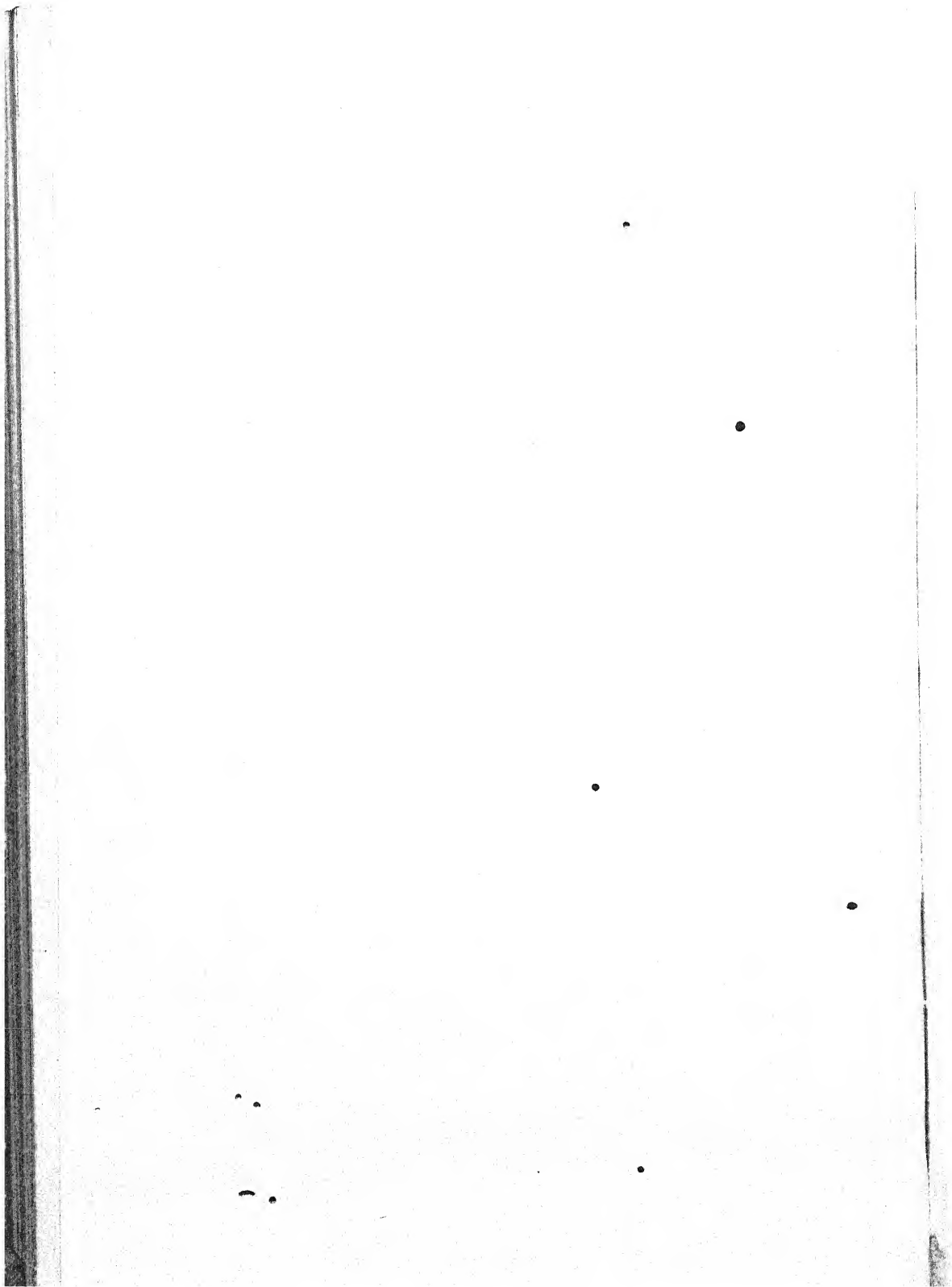
Rede saumme miffie.

Finial d'on def a Colonel Hugnet.

3052

Toutes connaitre au marichet French que le  
General ~~le~~ Franckel d'Esprey a été nommé au  
commandement de la V. Alonix, Il a ordre agir  
en relation étroite et cordiale avec le marichet. Je  
porte bon espoir sur cette entente.

J. Joffre





Paris unless three or four active army corps were sent to him. To this I had answered on the morning of the 3rd, by enumerating the forces which had been placed at his disposition.<sup>25</sup> During my absence two other letters had arrived from the Military Governor of Paris, one official, the other in writing and of a more personal character. The first was as follows:

H. Q. Armies of Paris  
No. 622

Les Invalides  
Sept. 3rd 09:10.

From The Military Governor of Paris

To The Commander-in-Chief of the Group of Armies of the N. E.

I have received an order from the Minister of War informing me that the Entrenched Camp of Paris has been placed under your orders, as contemplated in Article 144, Instructions for the Conduct of Large Units, and Article 151 of the Decree concerning the defence of Fortified Places, for the purpose of enabling you, should the case arise, to have the mobile garrison of Paris co-operate with our field armies, without, however, separating this garrison from Paris by such a distance as would compromise the city's safety.

I, therefore, have the honour to request that you give me instructions as to the rôle which you contemplate assigning to the Army of Paris in your general operations. In this connection, I beg leave to point out that the Paris garrison consists, to a considerable extent, of Territorial troops, very imperfectly equipped for field operations and with only slight capacity for manœuvre. They have neither fighting nor regimental transport, although I am now trying to improvise some for them. They have hardly any artillery and little ammunition. They have no parks, convoys or field hospitals.

Unless I receive orders from you to the contrary, I shall try to hold out in Paris as long as possible, but by reason of the weakness of our defences, especially in the north-east, we are exposed to seeing this front forced, unless—I emphasize this point—you intervene with a diversion when the proper moment arrives.

GALLIENI.

To this letter was attached another, written in the General's own hand:

Military Government of Paris  
Office of the Governor

Paris Sept. 3,  
1914

From General Gallieni, Military Governor of Paris and Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of Paris,

To General Joffre.

My dear Joffre:

I have just received a letter from the Minister placing me under your orders. I assure you of my fullest co-operation, but I want to point

<sup>25</sup> These forces were the following: Maunoury's army (VII Corps and 3 reserve divisions), the 45th Division (from Algeria), the IV Corps (which was to entrain September 3rd at 00.05 a.m.), Ebener's group (61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions), and the territorial divisions.

out to you clearly the situation which exists in the Entrenched Camp. The works and the artillery are old-fashioned, ammunition is lacking, the Territorial troops are insufficient in number and poor in quality, etc., etc. I enumerate these merely by way of indicating to you that our capacity of resistance—and especially as regards of offensive resistance—is rather small, for the moment at least.

General Maunoury will occupy his positions in front of the north sector this evening; the British are now transferring themselves behind the Marne, doubtless in conformity with your intentions.

I request you to state to me in writing, as exactly as you can, the rôle which you desire to have played by the Entrenched Camp of Paris, under the conditions now obtaining in it, during the various phases of your operations. We will do our best to co-operate with you or give a helping hand to your plans.

I have sent you information concerning the measures I have taken. This information will enable you to see what we are capable of doing.

I would be grateful if you would keep in mind the fact that, in leaving me here alone, the Government has placed upon me the responsibility for maintaining order amongst the people of Paris, who have suddenly learned that the Government has departed and that the military situation is not favourable. This news has come at the very moment when, in view of the encouraging communiqués published up to that time, they were expecting a success. I, therefore, request you not to lose sight of this consideration.

These people are thirsty for information, and if we want to keep them in the same good spirits as now prevail, we must give it to them. I think it is indispensable that you send me daily through our liaison officers, or by telephone or telegraph, whenever you judge it useful, communiqués describing the general situation of the Franco-British Armies, or relating events in other theatres, and in general everything that would interest the Paris population.

Ever most sincerely yours,

GALLIENI.

In answer, I wrote two letters. The first, an official one, was dictated shortly before midnight of September 3rd. It was as follows:

General Headquarters  
Armies of the East,  
General Staff, 3rd Bureau  
No. 3636

G.H.Q., Sept. 4, 1914.  
0.25<sup>26</sup>

From The Commander-in-Chief of the Group of Armies of the North-east  
To The Military Governor of Paris

In reply to your letter No. 622 of September 3, 1914, I have the honour to inform you that I have no intention of using the Territorial troops belonging to the Entrenched Camp of Paris in the operations of our field

<sup>26</sup> This is the date and time on which the letter was despatched by the G.H.Q. Signal Service.

armies in the neighbourhood of Paris; this by reason of the poor manœuvring capacity of these troops.

On the other hand, I expect to call upon the active and reserve troops of the garrison to aid in these operations, and more especially to employ them for action in the direction of Meaux, when the offensive contemplated in Instructions No. 4 and Note No. 3463, a copy of which is sent herewith, takes place.<sup>27</sup>

JOFFRE.

To this official communication, I added the following letter written in longhand:

G.H.Q., Sept. 4th, 1914

My dear Gallieni,

I am addressing you an official letter containing instructions relative to the military action of the forces under your orders. You will receive at the same time a copy of a letter which I am sending Field Marshal French and which will enlighten you on the same subject.<sup>28</sup>

A part of General Maunoury's active troops can be pushed to the north-east at any moment from now on, so as to threaten the right flank of the Germans and thus give the British left the feeling that they are being supported on this side.

It would be useful to inform Sir John French of this and also to keep in constant touch with him.

I have sent General Lanrezac, who commanded the Fifth Army, to report to you. His lack of enterprise and his indecision constituted a danger for this Army. You must not pay any attention to his pessimism, which makes him see only the risks involved in an operation and paralyzes his initiative. He has a remarkably clear intelligence and he can discuss any military question admirably; but in action he seems unable to draw the proper conclusions from what his brain perceives. As a professor he was altogether unusual, but his work in the war has not fulfilled the hopes he had inspired in time of peace. I put him at your disposition; do what you like with him.

Your faithful and devoted friend

J. JOFFRE.

This letter, written during the last hours of September 3rd, requires some explanation.

It will be recalled that on the morning of that day we were not yet

<sup>27</sup> A copy of General Instructions No. 4 had been addressed to the Military Governor of Paris on September 1st, at the moment it was sent to the armies concerned. Note No. 3463 was a personal and secret communication sent the evening of September 2nd to the commanders of armies. In the latter it was prescribed that as soon as we resumed the offensive, the garrison of Paris was to operate in the direction of Meaux.

<sup>28</sup> This letter, numbered 3675, had been written during the middle of the night of September 3rd/4th; it left the Signal Section of G.H.Q. for British G.H.Q. at 8 a.m., September 4th.

sure as to the general direction of the German First Army's march; for the evening before it appeared that some of von Kluck's corps were again moving towards Paris. During the evening of the 3rd, however, various pieces of information, all concurring, revealed the fact that the whole of the German First Army was marching in a south-easterly direction. Towards 7 p.m. Maunoury telephoned from Raincy that the German forces opposed to him seemed to have moved south-east towards the Marne in their march of September 3rd, and that reconnaissances made late in the afternoon had reported no German force west of the high-road Louvres-Senlis-Verberie.

At 9 p.m. the Military Governor of Paris informed us that air reconnaissances had observed a column nine or ten miles long marching through Etrepilly and moving south-east. About the same time Colonel Huguet telephoned as follows: "Reliable reports coming from British air force and all confirming each other indicate that the entire German First Army, except the IV Reserve Corps (that is to say, the II, III, and IV Corps and the 18th Division), is moving south-east with the object of crossing the Marne between Château-Thierry and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and attacking the left of the Fifth Army. The heads of columns will doubtless arrive at the river this evening."

Shortly afterwards a telegram arrived from Huguet confirming the fact that the British air force had reported that the German First Army was no longer marching southwards but had changed its direction to the south-east. "It would seem that at 5 o'clock this afternoon," he added, "there were no more enemy troops in front of the British and it looks as though the entire German First Army is moving to cross the Marne between La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Château-Thierry in order to attack the left of the Fifth Army."

Finally about 10 p.m. a new message was telephoned by the chief of the French Mission at British G.H.Q., saying that it seemed possible that Sir John French, whose units had just received their first reinforcements, would put his army in march the evening of the fourth in an easterly direction, "above all if the Sixth Army—which appears to have nothing in front of it—should begin the same day a similar movement carrying it to the left of the British."

In the presence of information as affirmative and precise as this was, in the presence of the menace which threatened the Fifth Army with envelopment, it can readily be conceived that there could no longer be any thought of keeping Maunoury's forces idle under the guns of Paris.

On the contrary, everything pointed—especially since the British appeared disposed to participate in the manœuvre—to directing all the active and reserve forces of the Entrenched Camp towards the east.

These were the considerations which prompted me to send Gallieni the instructions I have quoted above.

*September 4th.* The day of September 4th opened with a decisive crisis in the strategic situation. In the first place, the change in the direction of march of the enemy columns not only became confirmed but seemed to be accentuated. In the second place, Sir John French, in acknowledging the receipt of my General Instructions No. 4 and my Memorandum of September 2nd, addressed to army commanders, informed me—a capital point—that he fully understood my plans and the part I wished the British Army to play in them.

As the imprudent situation in which the Germans had placed themselves was now absorbing my whole attention, I desired to take advantage of the new attitude of the British Commander-in-Chief, in which such a happy change had taken place; therefore, about 8 o'clock the next morning (September 4th), I wrote French a letter from which I extract the following paragraph:

"In the event of the German armies continuing their movement towards the south-south-east, which is carrying them away from the Seine and Paris, it may be that you consider, as I do, that your action could be most effectively pronounced on the right bank of this river, between the Seine and the Marne. Your left, resting on the Marne, and supported by the Entrenched Camp of Paris, would be covered by the mobile troops of the Capital's garrison, since they are to attack in an easterly direction along the left bank of the Marne."

After writing this letter, I went to Colonel Pont's office, where I found assembled a group of officers belonging to this bureau: Major Partonneaux, Major Bel, Major Alexandre and Lieutenant-Colonel Magnin, liaison officer with the Military Governor of Paris. They were having an animated discussion in front of a large map on which were marked the positions of our troops and those of the enemy—the latter set down in accordance with the latest information received.

The situation was impressive. Our troops stretched through Verdun and Sainte-Menheould, then along the Marne, which they crossed between Epernay and Château-Thierry, then through Montmort and La Ferté-Gaucher. The British Army lay south of the Marne, from La Ferté-sous-Jouarre to Lagny. The Sixth Army was throwing up en-

trenchments on the line Mareuil-en-France-Dammartin-Moutgé. In this way our front formed the arc of a vast circle having an enveloping form in relation to that of the enemy. His forces oriented in a south-south-easterly direction, reached the Marne between Château-Thierry and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre.

Thus our Fifth Army, freed from the enveloping movement directed against its left, was now in a position to make a frontal attack against the enemy columns in the act of crossing the Marne above La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, while the British Army and the mobile troops of the Paris garrison were well placed for assailing in flank the German forces which had diverged from the direction of Paris.

It, therefore, seemed that the dispositions sought for in General Instructions No. 4 of September 1st were on the point of being realized, and that it was not necessary to continue the retreat up to the points which on that date I had indicated as its limit.

Desiring to discuss the question with General Berthelot, I walked into his office, which adjoined that of the Operations Bureau. To my great surprise, I found that my Deputy Chief of Staff looked at the matter in quite a different way from myself. In his opinion it was preferable "to let the Germans entangle themselves more deeply in the net"; the Sixth Army, he added, was not yet complete, by reason of the delay which had occurred in the move of one of the divisions of the IV Corps; as Berthelot saw it, the principal offensive should be made by the right of the Fifth Army and the whole of the Ninth Army, starting from the region of Arcis-sur-Aube and then extending in a north-westerly direction between the Seine and the Marne; while the British Army, aided by Maunoury on the left, would take the offensive south of the Marne, its left flank resting on that river.

This conception, so different from the one which had first presented itself to my mind, was based above all upon the difficult situation of the Fifth Army, which, thought Berthelot, made it impossible for that army suddenly to face about in the midst of its retreat and resume the offensive; it seemed to him preferable to have this army first fall back to some strong line—for example, the bridge-head at Nangis, which Major Maurin was at that moment reconnoitring.

The drawback to Berthelot's proposal struck me forcibly. By waiting several days longer we risked missing the opportunity offered us and seeing the Germans sense the danger and manœuvre to avoid it. Moreover, who could guarantee that they would continue to neglect Paris? The



idea of an immediate enveloping action against the German right flank took an even stronger hold upon me during this conversation.

Our talk was still going on when, about 10 a.m., I was advised that General Clergerie, Gallieni's Chief of Staff, had just telephoned to Major Pellé to inform him that the whole of the German First Army was slipping to the south-east. Gallieni feared that this movement would endanger the Fifth Army, and he proposed, therefore, to push Maunoury's army, reinforced by all the available elements of the Entrenched Camp, towards the east. "Under these circumstances," he added, "it is important that the British Army should march towards Montereau."

This suggestion proved to me that Gallieni had received my personal letter and memorandum No. 3636, sent to him the previous night, and that he fully comprehended the rôle which might devolve upon the active units of the troops told off to defend Paris; it was evident that he had definitely abandoned his idea of consecrating his entire force to a passive defence of the Entrenched Camp.

Berthelot now renewed his objections to this conception of the battle, asserting that we were going to reveal prematurely our intentions to the enemy. He continued to urge an operation whose principle characteristic would be an offensive debouching from the region of Arcis-sur-Aube toward the north-west. Having made up my mind to reject these suggestions, I sent a message to Gallieni that I approved Maunoury's Army starting its march in an easterly direction. On receiving this communication, Gallieni informed me that he was arranging with Maunoury to put his army in movement the evening of September 4th; it would be ready to act either north or south of the Marne, as circumstances dictated; the Governor of Paris asked to be informed which of these two solutions I preferred.

I was tempted to reply immediately that the Sixth Army should develop its action north of the Marne; but Berthelot insisted so strongly that I yielded in part to his arguments. But, in any case, the Sixth Army would be unable to cross the Marne on September 4th and there would always be time to direct it to the north of the river, should the situation make a more rapid counter-offensive possible; moreover, it was advantageous not to push the Sixth Army towards the east too soon, so as not to reveal our manœuvre to the Germans before we had time to arrange that all our armies along the whole front would participate in the attack.

I answered General Clergerie, at 1 p.m., that of the two propositions he had transmitted relative to the employment of General Maunoury's

troops, I considered the more preferable one was to move the Sixth Army to the left bank of the Marne south of Lagny.<sup>29</sup>

In making this answer, my object was to avoid modifying prematurely the manœuvre in course of execution; for my decision had not yet fully ripened. It was also impossible wholly to disregard some of Berthelot's objections, especially as to the difficulty the Fifth Army would have in executing a face-about on open ground, and attacking the enemy. I decided to consult Franchet d'Esperey by telegram. "Circumstances are such," I said, "that it may be to our advantage to deliver battle tomorrow or the day after against the German First and Second Armies with all the forces of the Fifth Army in conjunction with the British Army and the mobile elements of the Paris garrison. Please inform me whether you consider your army to be in condition to undertake this attack with chances of success."<sup>30</sup>

At the same time I sent Lieutenant-Colonel Paquette to see General Foch, to inform him of the general situation (of which he was ignorant) and ask him what he thought he could do.

In addition to the uncertainty I felt in regard to the possibility of the Fifth Army's resuming an offensive, another circumstance likewise inclined me to delay my decision: this was the attitude of the British Army. In suggesting that this army should move to Montereau, Gallieni seemed to be admitting that it would not participate in the action; but I could not accept any such hypothesis. Nevertheless, towards noon, I was advised by Huguot that Sir John French, who the day before was anxious to march eastwards, had now changed his mind, under the restraining advice of his Chief of Staff, General Murray, and had decided that his troops must take a rest during the day of September 4th and then make ready to resume their retreat to a point three days' march behind the Seine.

I waited all the afternoon in expectation of the replies from Foch and Franchet d'Esperey. The heat was overpowering. We were all thinking of the suffering the men must be enduring, and we asked ourselves whether they would be in a condition to perform the work we were planning for them.

Towards 2 p.m. information came in that three German columns composed of all arms had crossed the Marne at Château-Thierry and below that place; this gave rise to the fear that the cavalry corps covering

<sup>29</sup> This telegram was not received at the headquarters of the Military Government of Paris until 2.50 p.m., that is to say, after the departure of General Gallieni for Melun. He did not learn its contents until his return to Paris, about 7.30 that evening.

<sup>30</sup> Telegram No. 3704 to the Fifth Army, September 4th, 12.45 p.m.

the left wing of the Fifth Army would be forced to withdraw to the south of the Petit Morin. This news led me to believe that, even if the battle could take place very shortly, it would not be on the north bank of the Marne that we would have to look for the enemy's right wing, but on the south.

The decision I had to take with reference to the form to be given to the battle depended essentially on the reply from Franchet d'Esperey, and this threat of envelopment on his left seemed likely to diminish the effectiveness of his army's action. This was all that was needed to cause Berthelot to return to the charge and urge upon me the advantages of the manœuvre he desired me to make, that is, a central attack in a north-westerly direction. He suggested to me that, in any case, as a preparation for the coming battle, I should modify the composition of the Fourth Army as well as the limits of its zone of action.

It was about 3.30 p.m. when I signed General Instructions No. 5, which ordered these various changes and at the same time prescribed that the Third Army should maintain a position on the enemy's flank, ready at any moment to pass to the offensive facing north-west. Whatever might be my final decision, whether I fixed upon an immediate battle or whether, on receiving the reply awaited from the Fifth Army, I took the resolution to delay the moment of decisive action for five or six days, this modification of zones of operations and this orientation given to the Third Army would be useful. In the afternoon I also decided that the next day I would once more move my headquarters farther to the rear; for Bar-le-Duc had become too close to the front for communications to be properly maintained. I decided upon Châtillon-sur-Seine.

All the information that came in during the day clearly established the fact that the German First Army, neglecting Paris and Maunoury's forces (before which no enemy could be found), was continuing its march towards the Marne above La Ferté-sous-Jouarre.

It must have been about four o'clock in the afternoon when I received a telegram from Colonel Huguet, telling me of Gallieni's visit to British G.H.Q. Gallieni had gone to see French, as I had requested him to do in my letter written during the night of September 3rd/4th, and had informed him of my order directing the Sixth Army to move eastwards. French had replied to Gallieni that he would remain on his present positions south of the Marne as long as possible, ready to co-operate with either the Fifth or the Sixth Army or with both, as the situation might require. Huguet also informed me that French was to have an

interview with Franchet d'Esperey at 3 p.m., and that the positions of the British Corps were to be modified so as to permit the army to move forward facing east.

This telegram greatly influenced my decisions. It reached me in the midst of the disquieting atmosphere which prevailed during all that afternoon of September 4th, as I anxiously awaited Franchet d'Esperey's reply before finally making up my mind. Berthelot continued, during these hours of waiting, tenaciously to defend his point of view, but the arrival of Huguet's message furnished me the proof that Gallieni had succeeded in inducing the British to take part in the battle, as I had asked him to do; moreover, this telegram gave me reason to hope that when Franchet d'Esperey learned of the agreement reached between French and Gallieni, he would give his approval to the manœuvre, as Foch had done in a reply just received and in which he announced himself as ready to attack.

However, night was approaching and I was anxious to come to a decision. I once more sent for Bélin and Berthelot to come to my office, where the three officers comprising my cabinet were already assembled. I asked the Chief of Staff and his Deputy once more to give me their opinion. Berthelot stood to his guns; Bélin hesitated. After having weighed all that they said, I decided that it was best to execute without change the manœuvre prepared the day before and which gave us an opportunity to take advantage of the out-flanking position occupied by the Fifth Army; moreover, it seemed well to take advantage of the excellent intentions manifested by the British. However, in order to meet the objections which Berthelot had opposed to this manœuvre ever since the morning, I fixed September 7th as the day for commencing the offensive.

This solution offered the advantage of allowing the Germans to advance farther into the interior of our enveloping formation and also of giving the necessary time to complete the move of our troops coming from the east.<sup>31</sup>

This additional day of waiting would make it easier for our armies to pass from retreat formations to those required for attack. Another consideration lay in the fact that the instructions for continuing the retreat on the 5th would have already been sent out from the various army headquarters before my order could reach them; in trying to

<sup>31</sup> The XV and XXI Corps, the 2nd Division of the IX Corps, Conneau's Cavalry Corps, XIV Corps. Unfortunately, these transports became blocked by reason of the evacuations which the Military Government of Paris caused to be executed, without asking for authority, on the railway to Lyons.

attack too suddenly I might run the risk of creating disorder. Finally, some little time would have to be allowed to arrange properly for the complete co-operation of Sir John French. All of these reasons led me to decide not to start the battle before September 7th. Gamelin was at this moment with me, and since, during the course of the day, we had several times gone over together the details of the manœuvre I had decided upon, I directed him to make a rough draft of the orders required to carry out the plan as I have outlined it above. He was to submit this to Colonel Pont.

It was now 6.30 p.m. I had invited to dinner that evening Major Clive and two Japanese officers. Not wishing to make them wait, we proceeded to my lodgings, leaving Major de Galbert on duty in my office at G.H.Q. Dinner was nearly over when the door opened and there entered Major Maurin, an officer of the Operations Bureau whom General Berthelot had sent to the vicinity of Nangis to reconnoitre new positions. On his way back, Major Maurin had stopped at Bray-sur-Seine, having perceived General Franchet d'Esperey on the point of leaving after a conference with General Wilson. The commander of the Fifth Army had charged Maurin to inform me that the British had agreed to halt and that under these conditions he was ready to attack on or after the 6th.

I could not hide my satisfaction. At about the same moment de Galbert telephoned from my office that important papers had just arrived from the Fifth Army. We hurried through dinner and, before it was finished, I excused myself to my guests and hastened to headquarters. Here I found two notes from Franchet d'Esperey, sent in answer to the question I had put to him. The first, dated Bray-sur-Seine, 4 p.m., ran as follows:

1. The battle cannot begin before the day after tomorrow, September 6th.
2. Tomorrow, September 5th, the Fifth Army will continue its withdrawal on the line Provins-Sézanne. The British Army will execute a change of direction facing east, on the line Changis-Coulommiers and to the southwards, provided its left flank is supported by the Sixth Army, which should reach the line of the Ourcq north of Lizy-sur-Ourcq tomorrow, September 5th.
3. On September 6th the general direction of the British offensive, would be Montmirail, that of the Sixth Army Château-Thierry, that of the Fifth Army Montmirail.

The second note, completing the one just quoted, said: In order for the operation to succeed, it is necessary:

1. To be able to count upon the close and complete co-operation of the Sixth Army, which must debouch on the left bank of the Ourcq, north-east of Meaux, on the morning of the 6th.
2. For the Sixth Army to reach the Ourcq tomorrow, September 5th; otherwise the British will not march.

My army can fight on the 6th, but its condition is far from brilliant. There is nothing to be expected from the three reserve divisions.

It would be well if Foch's Detachment could vigorously participate in the action; direction, Montmort.

These two answers, so complete in every respect, filled me with joy. They reflect the greatest honour upon their author. Twenty-four hours before, Franchet d'Esperey had taken command of an army in full retreat and considerably shaken. It was only natural for him to fear that the fighting capacity of these troops, tried as they had been by the terrible heat of that summer, was at a very low ebb. But with that intelligent audacity which is found only in the souls of great leaders, Franchet d'Esperey splendidly seized the situation and did not hesitate to answer "Yes" to a question which would have caused most men to flinch. I could not help thinking that if his predecessor had still been at the head of the Fifth Army, the answer I had just received would probably have been quite different. Moreover, the initiative taken by the new commander of the Fifth Army in bringing about the meeting at Bray, had re-established good relations between his army and the British. The rôle played by Franchet d'Esperey during the day of September 4, 1914, deserves to be written large across the pages of history: it is he who made the Battle of the Marne possible.

Since the commander of the Fifth Army and that most excellent representative of Sir John French, General Wilson, seemed in complete agreement, I felt that not an instant must be lost in accepting the suggestions contained in the two notes from Franchet d'Esperey, especially as I had no objection whatever to offer regarding the directions of attack which had been mutually agreed upon at Bray.

I, therefore, instructed Gamelin to go over the draft of the orders he had drawn up before dinner and modify it in conformity with General Franchet d'Esperey's proposals. He was engaged in doing this when word came that Gallieni asked to speak to me over the telephone. As I have always disliked using the telephone myself, I directed Bélin to answer, but Gallieni insisted upon speaking with me in person, so I went with my Chief of Staff into the telephone booth.

The Governor of Paris had just returned to his headquarters, where



he had found my telegram directing him to move the Sixth Army to the left bank of the Marne, south of Lagny. This constituted a modification of the orders which Gallieni himself had given Maunoury for the afternoon of the following day. I reassured Gallieni by informing him that since sending him my telegram at 1 p.m. I had taken the decision to begin a general offensive in which the Sixth Army was to participate. Moreover, I added, the orders were now being drawn up, and they contemplated that the action of Maunoury's army would take place on the north bank of the Marne, as Gallieni desired.

After this conversation over the telephone, I returned to my office. Gamelin or Berthelot was finishing the orders, which prescribed, as I had intended, that the offensive would take place September 7th. But I now considered that, in spite of my preference for that date, it was advisable to anticipate it by one day, on account of the dispositions already made by Gallieni. For these would bring about an encounter of the Sixth Army with the enemy on the afternoon of the 5th, Maunoury's attack would undoubtedly disclose the nature of our manœuvre and if we waited until the 7th, we would find the enemy on his guard. Moreover, both Foch and Franchet d'Esperey had accepted September 6th as the date for the attack, and by using diligence my orders could be got out early enough to enable the various army headquarters to draw up theirs in good time. I decided that the whole force should start its attack on the 6th. I had the dates altered accordingly. I signed the order and it was immediately taken to the coding section.

I must confess that it was with much unwillingness that I made this change in the date fixed for the offensive. I was convinced at the time, and I still remain so, that if it had been possible to put off the battle until the 7th, its results would have been considerably greater; for we would have caught the enemy in a position much more to his disadvantage than the one in which we actually found him. It was the precipitation given to the manœuvre of the Sixth Army which forced me to make this regrettable modification in my initial project.

It is unnecessary to quote here the text of General Order No. 6, as it has been frequently published. It indicated the dispositions to be completed by the evening of the 5th, as well as the direction of attack for the Allied armies on our left.<sup>32</sup>

At 9.30 p.m. I gave orders to call up the staff of the Military Governor

<sup>32</sup> General Order No. 6 was sent to the different armies in the form of coded telegrams; written confirmations were carried by officers in motor-cars.

of Paris for the purpose of informing Gallieni as to the fronts of attack of the various armies on the 6th.

Matters were thus settled when, towards 10 p.m., Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard, returning from a mission with Sordet's Cavalry Corps, came in to report to me that he had stopped during the afternoon at Gallieni's headquarters and at those of Sir John French at Melun. At the latter place he had seen Gallieni as he was leaving after a conference with French and Maunoury. My liaison officer related to me what had taken place at this meeting and this supplemented the impressions that Gallieni had transmitted to Bélin and me in his talk over the telephone at 8.30 that evening. The decision of the British Commander-in-Chief seemed to be less formal than I had been led to expect by the telegram from Huguet and the notes which Franchet d'Esperey had sent me after his interview with Wilson at Bray. This contradiction appeared to arise from the fact that Wilson, in his comprehensive way, had thought himself justified in taking engagements in the name of his chief, whereas the latter placed a certain number of restrictions upon his co-operation. From what Brécard reported, it was evident that the two agreements, that of Bray between Wilson and Franchet d'Esperey, and that of Melun between French and Gallieni, were not identical.

At almost the same moment, a telegram from Huguet announced that, by reason of the continual changes in the situation, Sir John French preferred to study the question anew before deciding definitely upon what he would do. There could be no doubt of it, a misunderstanding existed, and the whole agreement which I thought was operative for the battle now fully decided upon, was in doubt.

There was only one course to pursue, in view of the late hour of the night; that was to send a copy of the order destined for Sir John French to Melun by an officer who would explain to him the capital importance which I attached to his adhesion to my plan. Major de Galbert, fully acquainted with my intentions, was designated for this task. He left G.H.Q. in the middle of the night of September 4th/5th, in order to be at British Headquarters at daybreak.

*September 5th.* The uncertainty which obtained in regard to the intentions of the British at this critical moment was altogether agonizing. I felt that I must obtain the co-operation of their army at any price. If it was refused me, I saw the victory I anticipated slipping from my grasp. The necessity of undertaking new discussions brought the fear that I might ~~one~~ have to postpone the date I had fixed for the offensive.

I was watching impatiently for de Galbert to return. While waiting,

the idea came to me to seek diplomatic support for bringing pressure to bear upon French, and so in spite of my great objection to talking in advance to anyone concerning my plans, I decided to set forth to M. Millerand, in whose tact and patriotism I had such perfect confidence, the exact situation and the necessity of an intervention by the Government for the purpose of fortifying my request to the British Commander-in-Chief.

I sent him a personal letter in which I explained that the strategical situation had become most favourable and that I had decided to assume the offensive. I did not conceal from him that while the battle about to be engaged might have incalculable results in case of success, on the contrary, if we failed, the consequences would probably be extremely grave. I had decided to put in every man, up to the limit and without reserve; it was essential, however, for the British Army to do the same, if a victory was to be won, and "I count upon you," I added, "to call Sir John French's attention, through diplomatic channels, to the decisive importance of undertaking whole-heartedly this offensive. If I could give orders to the British Army as I would to a French Army, occupying the same positions, I would pass to the attack immediately."

I then had two orders prepared, one for the Third and one for the Fourth Army, to complete General Order No. 6, addressed the previous evening to our armies on the left. I had just signed these orders when Galbert arrived. It was about 9.30 a.m. He came back without having been able to see either Field Marshal French or any officer of his personal entourage. He had left my order with Colonel Huguet, who told him that our Allies had again taken advantage of darkness to fall back and that the feeling at headquarters seemed to have become very lukewarm towards a resumption of the offensive. Under these conditions, de Galbert considered that he himself had not the necessary weight for obtaining a change in Sir John's decision and he very properly thought that his duty was to return to me as quickly as possible and report the situation; he added that, in the opinion of all, no one except myself could possibly succeed in obtaining a change in the attitude of the British Commander-in-Chief.

My resolution was taken immediately. I had a message telephoned to Melun that I was coming to British G.H.Q. to see Sir John French, and I left, taking with me Lieutenant-Colonel Serret, Major Gamelin, Captain Muller, my A. D. C., and Major Clive.

At Sens we were stopped at a level-crossing for what seemed an interminable time by trains carrying the IV Corps—much delayed through the

blocking of the lines by the evacuations being effected by the Military Government of Paris. We stopped here for lunch. The Mayor of the town, Senator Cornet, learning of my presence, came to see me, much excited by the advance of the Germans. He wanted to know if he should begin the evacuation of the town's inhabitants towards the interior. I reassured him by telling him that our troops up to the present had only been executing prolonged manœuvre in retreat but that the hour had now arrived for us to face-about. I promised him that Sens would be protected. Somewhat comforted, M. Cornet shook hands effusively and departed. We then drove to Fontainebleau and so to Melun, where we arrived a little before 2 o'clock.

Huguet was waiting for us at British G.H.Q., and he conducted us to the Château of Vaux-le-Pénil. Here we found Sir John French, surrounded by the officers of his staff, notably Generals Murray and Wilson. These two men represented to my eyes the opposing tendencies which existed at British Headquarters: Wilson standing for the action that was favourable to us, Murray for the ideas I feared.

I immediately entered upon my subject. I put my whole soul into the effort to convince the Field Marshal. I told him that the decisive moment had arrived and that we must not let it escape—we must go to battle with every man both of us had and free from all reservations.

"So far as regards the French Army," I continued, "my orders are given, and, whatever may happen, I intend to throw my last company into the balance to win a victory and save France. It is in her name that I come to you to ask for British assistance, and I urge it with all the power I have in me. I cannot believe that the British Army will refuse to do its share in this supreme crisis—history would severely judge your absence."

Then, as I finished, carried away by my convictions and the gravity of the moment, I remember bringing down my fist on a table which stood at my elbow, and crying, "Monsieur le Maréchal, the honour of England is at stake!"

Up to this point French had listened imperturbably to the officer who was translating what I said, but now his face suddenly reddened. There ensued a short impressive silence; then, with visible emotion he murmured, "I will do all I possibly can." Not understanding English, I asked Wilson what Sir John had said. He merely replied, "The Field Marshal says 'Yes.'"

I had distinctly felt the emotion which seemed to grip the British Commander-in-Chief; above all, I had remarked the tone of his voice,

and I felt, as did all the witnesses to the scene, that these simple words were equivalent to an agreement signed and sworn to.

Tea, which was already prepared, was then served, after which French accompanied me to my car. I left behind with Huguet, Lieutenant-Colonel Serret, in whose energy and sagacity I had great confidence, and proceeded to Châtillon-sur-Seine, where my headquarters had been moved during the day. The officers of the staff were installed in an ancient convent of the Order of Cordeliers, and my own office was in what had formerly been a monk's cell. It was from here that I directed the battle of the Marne and it was in this room that, at half-past seven the next morning, I signed the following order addressed to the troops:<sup>88</sup>

We are about to engage in a battle on which the fate of our country depends and it is important to remind all ranks that the moment has passed for looking to the rear; all our efforts must be directed to attacking and driving back the enemy. Troops that can advance no farther must, at any price, hold on to the ground they have conquered and die on the spot rather than give way. Under the circumstances which face us, no act of weakness can be tolerated.

On arriving at Châtillon I found a telegram from the Minister of War in reply to the letter I had sent him to announce the imminent resumption of the offensive and to ask him to aid me in bringing Field Marshal French to a decision. M. Millerand informed me that he raised no objections to my plan, and that the Minister of Foreign Affairs was on his way to see the British Ambassador for the purpose of urging him to make representations to his Government in the sense I desired.

As has been seen, however, my visit to Sir John French had, in the meantime, cleared up the situation, and I now knew that I could count upon the co-operation of the British forces in the decisive battle about to be delivered.

There were also awaiting me at Châtillon the reports sent by the various armies; these showed that the prescribed movements had been effected everywhere without difficulty.

<sup>88</sup> This order was transmitted to all army headquarters between 8 and 9 a.m. Written confirmations were sent out at 6 p.m., September 6th.



## CHAPTER V

### *THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE*

AT THE moment when the battle on which the fate of the country depended was about to open, the military situation had taken on an aspect infinitely more favourable than anything I could have dared to hope for a few days before.

The French Third, Fourth, Ninth and Fifth Armies, with their right resting on the entrenched camp of Verdun, were deployed along a front of about 125 miles, roughly marked by Sermaize, Vitry-le-François, Sommesous, the Saint-Gond Marshes, Esternay and Courtacon. Thrown forward on their left in an advanced echelon were the British Army and the French Sixth Army; the first south-west of Coulommiers, the second north-west of Meaux, covered on its left by Sordet's Cavalry Corps. The line, in its general aspect, presented the form of a vast pocket, into which five German armies seemed bent upon engulfing themselves. For all the information gathered during the day of September 5th went to show that the enemy was vigorously pursuing his march to the south. His general dispositions appeared to be as follows:

Von Kluck's army (the First) had reached the vicinity of Coulommiers, having left a few elements on the right bank of the Ourcq; these were entrenching themselves facing west.

Von Bülow's army (the Second) had crossed the Marne between Dormans and Epernay on the morning of September 5th. At noon the heads of its columns were reported to be on a line running through Champaubert, Etoges, Bergères, Vertus.

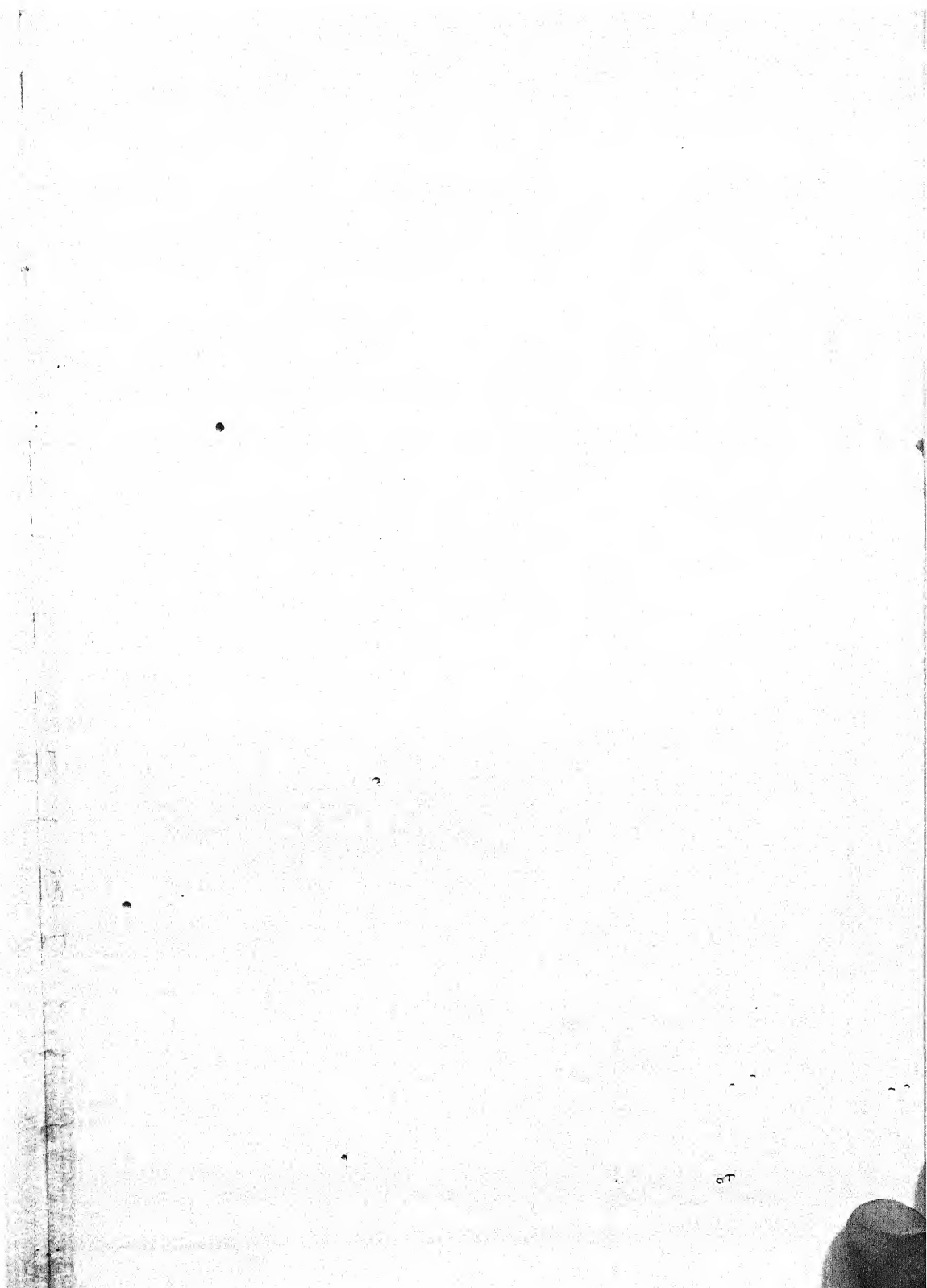
Von Hausen's army (the Third) had been identified only by its XII Corps, which, on September 4th, was reported to be at Condé-sur-Marne, between Epernay and Châlons.

The Prince of Württemberg's army (the Fourth) had reached the line Châlons, Francheville, Bussy-le-Repos, on September 5th.

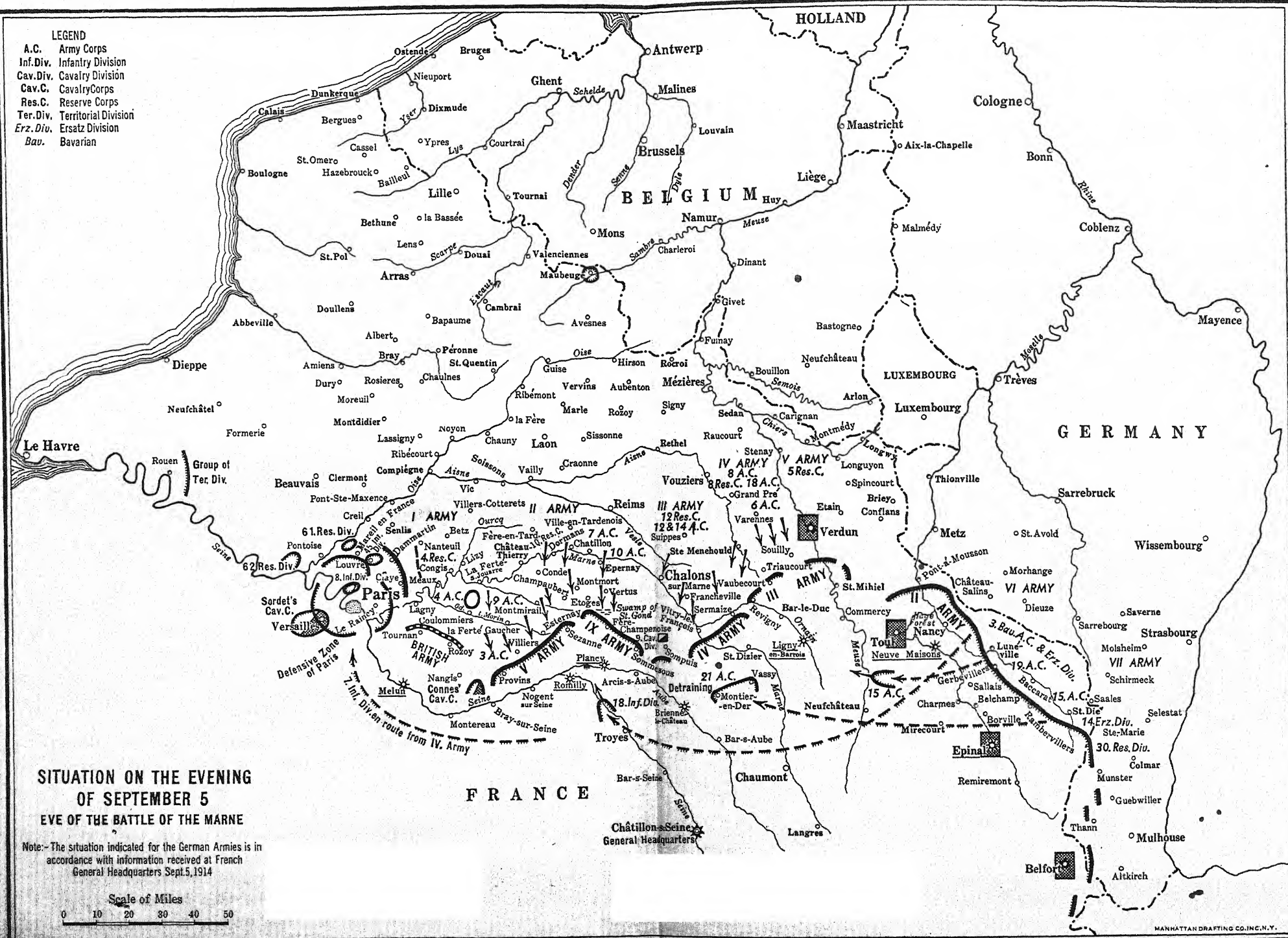
The Army of the German Crown Prince (the Fifth) was moving southwards on both sides of the Argonne.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Information Bulletins of G.H.Q. dated September 5th and 6th.





**LEGEND**  
 A.C. Army Corps  
 Inf.Div. Infantry Division  
 Cav.Div. Cavalry Division  
 Cav.C. Cavalry Corps  
 Res.C. Reserve Corps  
 Ter.Div. Territorial Division  
 Erz.Div. Ersatz Division  
 Bav. Bavarian





In this way the strategic conditions which I had envisaged on August 25th had at last been realized. The combination of circumstances which obliged me to renounce the manœuvre conceived that day and attempt another has already been described; and now, thanks to the movements made by the enemy himself, the manœuvre sketched out on the 25th again offered itself as a possibility.

But however advantageous the general situation appeared—above all, now that I could count upon the co-operation of the British—it can well be conceived that I was none the less beset by grave preoccupations. For in spite of the assurances which Generals Foch and Franchet d'Esperey had given me, I could not blind myself to the fact that this offensive, suddenly undertaken with armies worn out by an exhausting retreat, presented a problem bristling with uncertainties.

I have related in the preceding chapter how much I would have preferred to delay the attack until the 7th, in order to give time to reorganize the troops and get them better in hand, and I have explained the reasons which impelled me to renounce this brief delay, which would have been so useful to us. At the same time, I never for a moment had any doubt as to the response which our soldiers and their officers would make when asked to do the work I was about to demand of them. All the reports coming in showed that troops and staff were equally astonished at the length of this retreat, whose necessity they could not account for, and that they asked nothing better than to face about and attack. In short, thanks to the precaution I had taken a few days before in warning army commanders of the reasons which prompted me to continue to fall still farther back, our troops had preserved the mentality of a force which is manœuvring, instead of acquiring that of an army already beaten. In addition to this, reinforcements from the interior had replaced the heavy losses that had thinned our ranks during the opening days of the campaign.

I was confident that our men understood me thoroughly when I told them that the fate of our country now hung in the balance, and I felt altogether sure that I could count upon their steadiness; on the other hand, I was no less certain that the enemy's spirits must be at the highest pitch. And yet, in weighing the matter carefully, I was convinced that this very fact presented a greater danger for him than for us; for we could count upon the effect of the surprise which was certain to be produced by a sudden attack coming at the moment when the Germans were convinced that all they now had to do was to sweep up the remnants of our routed armies.

The army corps which had been sent to reinforce the sensitive points in our line of battle were still in course of movement. These were, notably, the XV Corps, destined for the Third Army, the XXI Corps destined for the Fourth Army, and a division of the IX Corps which was intended for the Ninth Army. This fact had its influence in increasing the regret I felt at having been obliged to start the battle on September 6th.

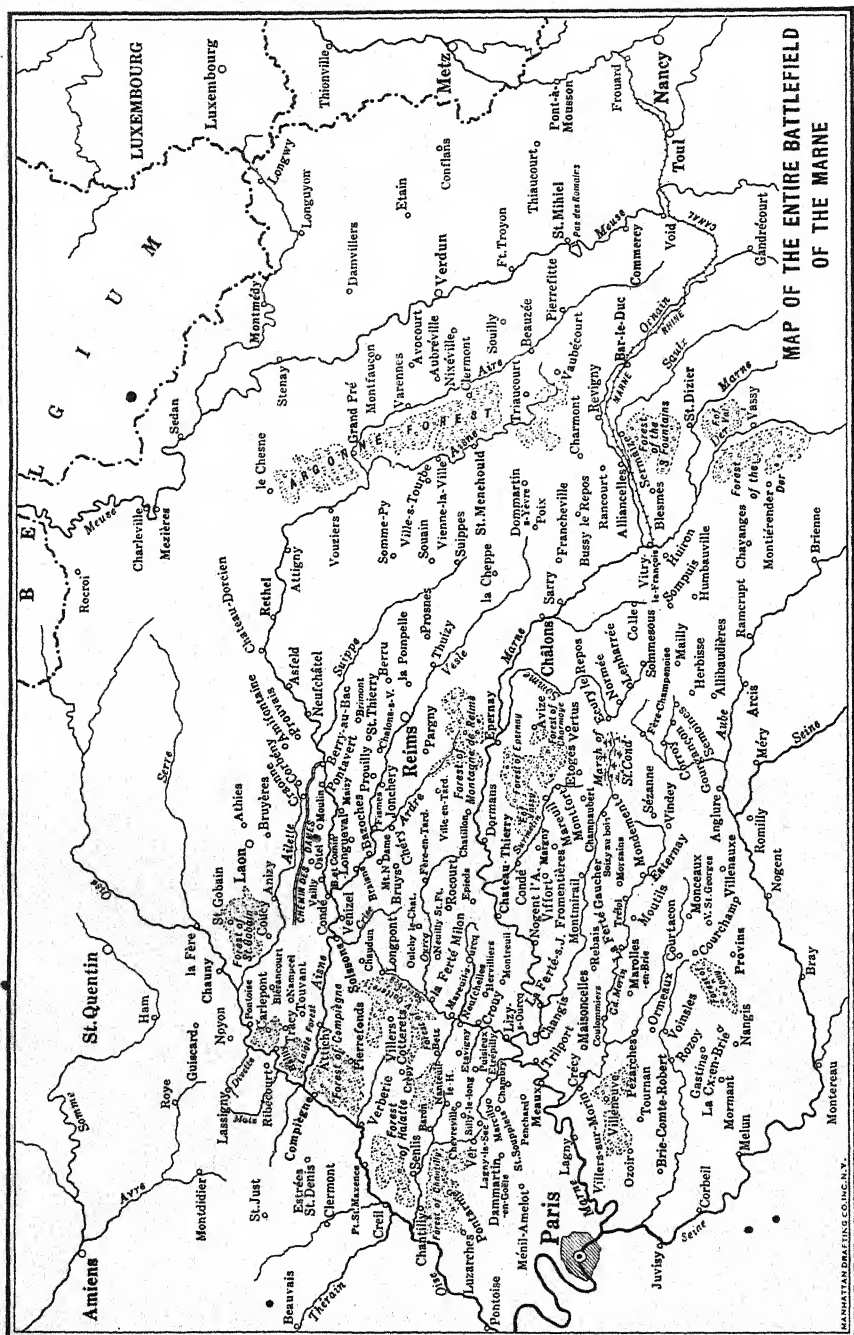
Ever since the 4th, combats had been raging with great violence on the Lorraine front. Here the enemy was seeking to get possession of Nancy, while at the same time, by an action in the Woëvre, he was menacing the rear of the Third Army. On the front of the First Army, he fortunately showed less activity; but as General Dubail had had his effectives considerably reduced, all he could do was to hold on to his positions.

The German attacks began on the afternoon of the 4th, and during the whole of the 5th they continued in the region of Gerbéviller and the Forest of Champenoux. That evening General de Castelnau reported that the enemy's numerical superiority, added to the power and range of his artillery—whose siege batteries had now made their appearance—rendered it improbable that the Second Army would be able to resist for any length of time. "If I am strongly pressed," he wrote, "I can either defend myself as long as possible where I am, or else I can slip away in good time and take up a position first along the Forest of Haye, Saffais, Belchamps and Borville, then fall back to another line and so try to hold out and continue to cover the right flank of the group of armies."

Now, if the manœuvre I was about to undertake was to succeed, I had to be sure that our two armies on the right flank would hold their ground, and it will be seen, as events are related, how grave a source of apprehension the Second Army continued to be for me during the whole Battle of the Marne.

All of our forces, as I wrote to the Minister of War, were now either in line or on the point of arriving. The only unit which remained available was the Second Moroccan Division; one of its brigades (General Cherrier) had just reached France and the other (General Gouraud) would not be able to complete disembarking before September 12th.

From the point of view of reinforcements, the Germans were in an even more precarious situation than ourselves. Their deployment had long since been completed, and our air service reported that there was no sign of any forces following up the advancing armies; this confirmed me in my idea that the enemy could not have any fresh body of troops







available. What was even more encouraging, information which I have previously referred to as indicating that important movements of German troops were taking place from west to east across Belgium, gave rise to the hope that the enemy had weakened the forces opposed to us. But we little guessed to what an extent this weakening of his line would be to our advantage—for it was not until later that we learned that the troops the Germans had withdrawn had been taken from their right—precisely the point against which I was preparing to make my strongest effort.

It has often been said that during a modern battle a commander-in-chief, having once put his forces into position and given his initial orders, has nothing further to do; all he can do is to await the results of a contest whose development he is powerless to control.

The Germans had inherited this theory from Marshal von Moltke. History shows that while the victor of Sadowa and Sedan conducted his troops methodically and with painstaking care up to the eve of battle, once the engagement began, he renounced all idea of directing it, and made no effort to impose his decisions during its progress. This method reflected the Marshal's temperament, disliking as he did to direct events which necessarily escaped all predetermination: he, therefore, admitted that the conduct of a battle was the affair of subordinate commanders. The wars in which he had been a chief actor brought no contradiction to this doctrine, von Moltke having had the rare good fortune to meet as adversaries only generals such as Benedek and Bazaine, whose inertia and passivity, one might say, were absolute.

Having observed that the results obtained by this method were excellent, the Germans decided that it was the right one to follow, and they continued to apply it. The younger von Moltke, nephew of the Marshal, and the general who commanded the German armies during the first weeks of the war, was not the sort of man, as far as one can judge, to modify a formula which accorded so well with the irresolution of his nature and which in his secret moments he must have found particularly satisfactory. In fact, documents now available make it perfectly clear that the German High Command, from its headquarters in distant Luxembourg, knew almost nothing of what was happening on the battlefield of the Marne; as a consequence, its action upon army commanders was only spasmodic: it did not keep them informed as to the general situation, its instructions to them were incomplete and arrived too late.

Quite another conception prevailed amongst us in France. We agreed

that sudden inspiration had no place in a modern battle; we recognized that the extent of its front, the size of its masses, and the length of time it might last, necessitated a more minute preparation than was the case in battles whose successive phases the commander-in-chief could follow with a spy-glass. Nevertheless, we believed that, in spite of all the difficulties, a battle could and should be directed. However intelligent and energetic the various army commanders might be, each one of them would know only what was happening over a small fraction of the line, and the events taking place in his immediate front would assume an importance to his eyes which would distort their perspective; the commander-in-chief alone could have a general view of the whole battle and assign its true value to each event. Moreover, as new situations would constantly present themselves, no one but the commander of the whole front could give the orders required to meet each one as it arose.

The Battle of the Marne brought out in strong relief the ideas I have just expressed. It began as soon as we had succeeded in concentrating around the German right a mass sufficiently heavy to give us on this part of the strategic field the double advantage of position and numerical superiority. In spite of this situation, if we had tried to apply inflexibly a formula of envelopment at any price—which, moreover, was never my intention—we would have been playing into the enemy's hands. But our forces were sufficiently strong and our system sufficiently flexible to prevent the inevitable reaction of the enemy from catching us unawares. Von Kluck could only ward off the menace which threatened his right by creating between his army and that of von Bülow a breach which continued to widen progressively. In this way, beginning with the second day, the battle of the Marne took on the characteristics of a rupture of the enemy's line, a rupture which the German Commander-in-Chief had neither the time nor the means to avoid.

This conception of how a battle should be conducted, when it is fought under the conditions presented by the wide extension of modern fronts, presupposes not only the existence of a complete unity of doctrine between the commander-in-chief and his subordinates, but also implies that sure and rapid communication between them can be effected through the telegraph and telephone and by means of staff officers, who are, properly speaking, exponents of the very brain and will of the commander-in-chief. The task which fell to these liaison officers was extremely delicate, and they have sometimes been accused of assuming to themselves an authority out of all proportion to their rank. It is possible that errors were committed by these men; it is also likely that they at times

became victims of the enmity aroused by pitiless decapitations which the interest of the country had induced me to make.

Be all this as it may, the fact remains that although I was obliged to stay at my headquarters during the whole of this battle,<sup>2</sup> in order to take the decisions which circumstances at any hour of the day or night might require, I was able, nevertheless, to command a deployment whose right rested on the Vosges and whose left, if we include d'Amade's divisions, extended as far as Rouen.

The courage and tenacity of our men being granted, it was the French system of command which triumphed at the Marne.

I have no intention of describing the battle, for that has been done many times. In what follows, I shall confine myself to indicating what my personal action was during its various phases.

Manoury's army was established during the day of September 5th between the Ermenonville Forest and the Marne, from Meaux to Vers. On its right some collisions occurred that day with the enemy, notably at Penchard, Monthyon, and Saint-Soupplets. For September 6th, its objective was the Ourcq, from Lizy to Neufchelles. But it immediately encountered the German IV Reserve Corps, which put up a desperate resistance and was soon after supported by the whole of the II Corps; the latter had been recalled by forced marches from Coulommiers, and now endeavoured to outflank our left around Etavigny. On September 6th at nightfall, the Sixth Army was halted on the line Chambry-Marcilly-Puisieux-Betz, that is to say, a long way from its first objective. Nevertheless, the earliest results of the entrance into action of this army soon became apparent to my eyes.

The Fifth Army had advanced on the morning of the 6th from the front Sézanne-Villers-Saint-Georges-Courchamps, and towards noon had encountered the enemy. Conneau's Cavalry Corps, to the north of the Jouy forest covered its left and assured its liaison with the British Army. The latter had started that morning, not from the front Changis-Coulommiers, as was indicated for it in General Orders No. 6, but from a line situated 9 miles to the south-east, running from Pézarches to Lagny; by the evening its left had reached the west bank of the Grand

<sup>2</sup> I forced myself throughout the battle of the Marne and during the delicate phase which followed it (to be precise, from September 5th to the 20th) to remain at my headquarters. I went out of my office only for the purpose of taking a daily walk of a mile or two and eating my meals. I slept at night in the Château de Marmont, which Colonel Maître had placed at my disposal.

Morin without difficulty, while its right, thrown back, lay in the region of Pézarches.

At 11 a.m. on the 7th Franchet d'Esperey reported to me that the German First Army "on the front Esternay-Courtacon was in full retreat towards the north" . . . and that the Fifth Army was pursuing its advance. During the evening, while the X Corps, on its right, was supporting Foch's left division (the 42nd) towards Loizy-au-Bois, its centre and left had reached the line Marsains-Tréfoils-Moutils, and Conneau's cavalry had arrived at La Ferté-Gaucher. By the close of the day the British Army had attained the line Choisy-Coulommiers-Maisoncelles, without meeting serious resistance.

On the other hand, our Sixth Army attempted in vain to reach the Ourcq; the enemy in front of it continued to receive re-enforcements and von Kluck parried all the efforts which Maunoury made to effect an envelopment of his right in the direction of Betz.

On the evening of the 7th the situation of the German armies in front of our left appeared to me to be as follows:

To meet Maunoury's attack, which manifestly had surprised him, von Kluck had constituted on the Ourcq a detachment composed of the IV Reserve Corps, the II Active Corps and the 4th Cavalry Division, while with the rest of his army he was fighting, facing the south, against Franchet d'Esperey's left. Between these two main portions of the German First Army, a gap had been produced, opposite the British; this breach was masked by German cavalry forces, large, indeed, but not strong enough to hold up our Allies.

My idea, therefore, was for Franchet d'Esperey with his left to attack that part of the German First Army which faced him; to push the British Army into the gap I have just mentioned (crossing successively the Grand Morin, the Petit Morin and the Marne); and at the same time to accentuate Maunoury's enveloping movement by directing it, no longer upon Château-Thierry but farther north on the right bank of the Ourcq. This was the basis of the instructions I issued to our three armies on the left during the afternoon of September 7th.<sup>3</sup>

While this was happening on our left, the battle was developing less favourably on our centre and right. The left of Foch's army, strongly

<sup>3</sup> In order better to co-ordinate the movements of the Sixth Army, which was now getting farther and farther away from the Capital, I sent a telegram on the morning of the 7th to the Military Governor of Paris to inform him that hereafter I would send my orders direct to General Maunoury, a copy being addressed to the Governor. This decision was essential, and, for the purpose of gaining time, I had already been obliged to send orders direct to the Sixth Army—notably General Orders No. 6 of September 4th for the resumption of the general offensive.

supported by Franchet d'Esperey's left, resisted all the assaults of the enemy in the region of Loizy-au-Bois and Mondemont, but its right had been forced to give ground ever since the opening of the battle. Fère-Champenoise had been lost and on the evening of the 8th the line ran through Semoine-Gourgancon-Carroy, which represented a loss of eight miles. This retirement derived additional gravity from the fact that it opened still further the wide interval which separated Foch's right from the Fourth Army's left. As early as the 6th, I had already called General de Langle's attention to the need of keeping strong reserves in rear of his left ready to counter-attack enemy forces which might seek to turn Foch's right, and it was for this purpose that I had placed the XXI Corps at de Langle's disposal. This corps was supposed to arrive in the region of Wassy, Montierender on the 7th.

Unfortunately, ever since the morning of the 7th the Fourth Army had been at grips with the German Fourth Army reinforced by a part of the Third (von Hausen), and by a combination of circumstances for which de Langle was in no way to blame, the left of his army, contrary to anticipations, had become precisely the weakest point of his line. The infantry of the XII Corps, which it had been necessary to send by rail to the region of Chavanges during the preceding days, could as yet put only a few battalions in line to the south of Vitry-le-François; these supported as best they could the corps artillery. Then the main body of the XVII Corps, also much fatigued, had only reached the Aube near Ramerupt and had hardly started its advance east of Mailly.

What made it all the more difficult for General de Langle to reinforce his left flank during the first days of the battle was the fact that a gap existed (marked by the forest of Trois Fontaines) between his right and Sarraill's left, and the fighting on this wing was extremely severe. Sarraill complained violently of the situation, demanding an energetic action on the part of the II Corps (right of the Fourth Army) against Revigny or Contrisson, while waiting for the XV Corps (sent by the Second Army) to get into line north-west of Bar-le-Duc, between the Saulx and the Ornain.

It was thus that for a moment I was assailed by the fear of seeing the centre of my line broken by a double rupture, one on each wing of the Fourth Army.

Fortunately, nothing of the sort took place. Von Hausen's army, engaged partly against Foch's right and partly against de Langle's left, was unable to penetrate into the 25-mile gap which lay between the two armies, and which was most inadequately masked by our 9th Cavalry



Division. Beginning on September 8th the infantry of the now reconstituted XII Corps brought new strength to the front of the Fourth Army, while that same evening the XXI Corps arrived at Sompins, ready to support the left of this army; its entry into action, however, was too late to obtain any tangible results that day.

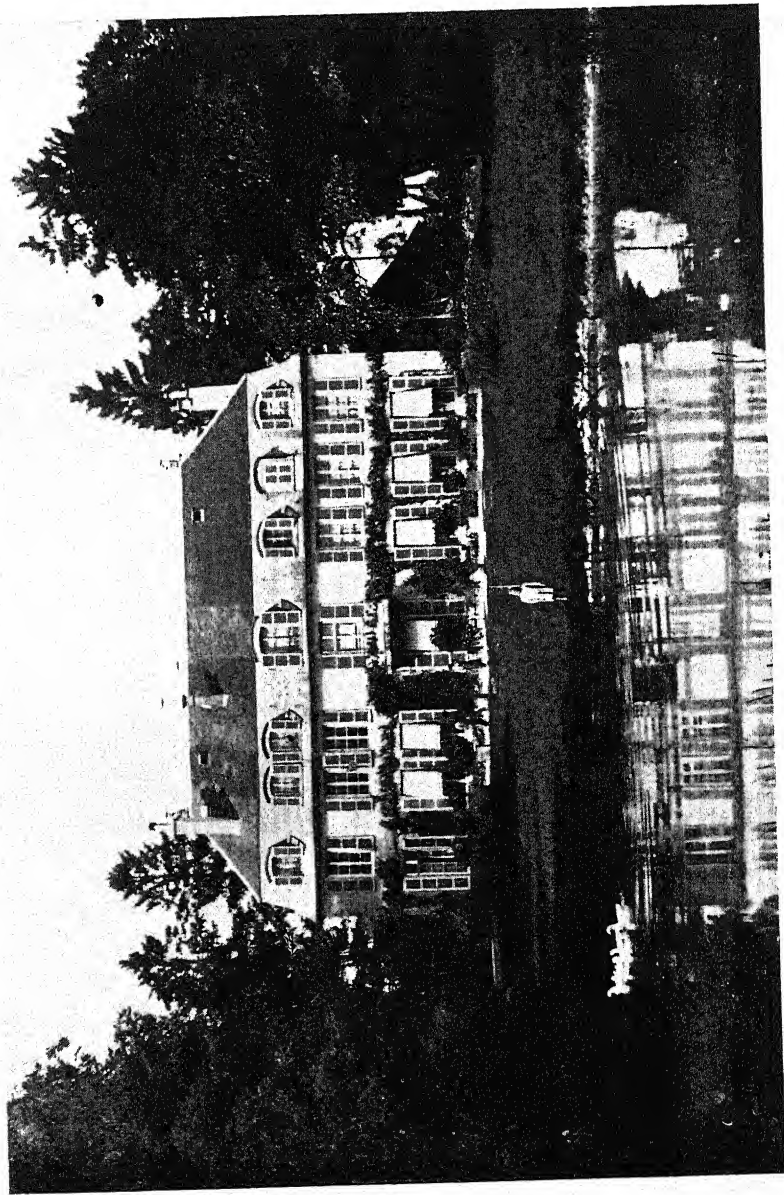
Turning now to the Third Army, I sent on September 7th, two orders<sup>4</sup> to General Sarrail. In these I directed him to do all in his power to help the Fourth Army, just as the latter was bending every effort towards supporting the Ninth. Moreover, when evening arrived on September 8th, the XV Corps, after being at first forced back between the Saulx and the Ornain by the enemy's pressure, had finally succeeded in gaining ground, thus assuring the liaison between the Third and Fourth Armies.

But now a new danger arose in front of Sarrail: enemy detachments were marching towards the Meuse in the neighbourhood of Saint-Mihiel, and the fort at Troyon had been vigorously bombarded by the Germans on the evening of the 8th. To parry this threat General Sarrail caused the bridges over the Meuse to be destroyed and had the river guarded by the 7th Cavalry Division.

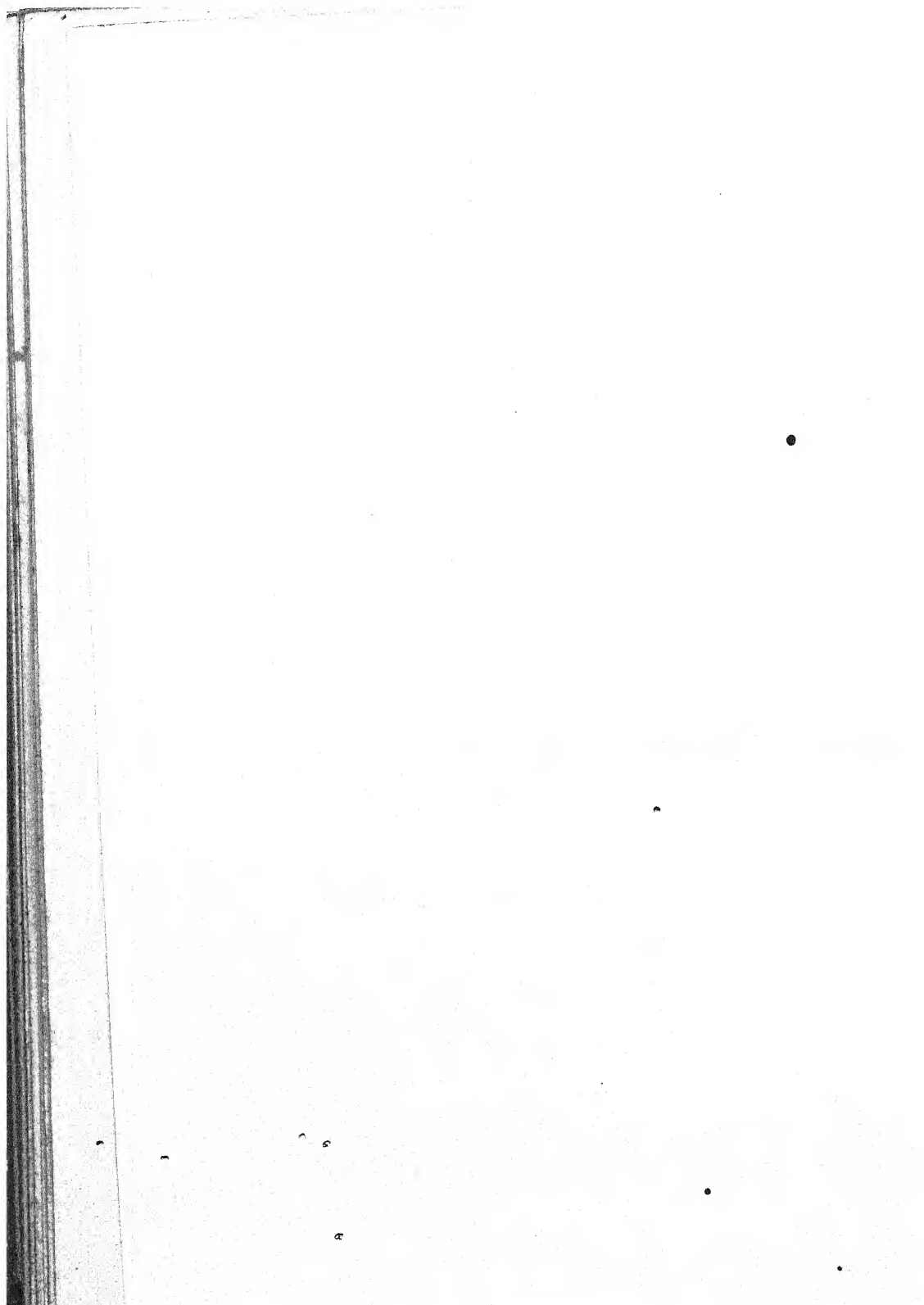
As a matter of fact the situation of the Third Army had become delicate, largely because its commander considered himself obliged to maintain contact with the fortress of Verdun. At 8 p.m. on September 8th I sent him an order authorizing him, if the need arose, to draw back his right so as to assure his communications and thus give greater power to the action of his left wing. In this way I showed Sarrail that I attached more importance to having the Third Army keep in touch with the Fourth than I did to its liaison with Verdun; indeed, in case of necessity, that fortress was quite capable of taking care of itself. To reassure Sarrail and bring some help to his task, I had directed Castelnau, the preceding day, to send the 2nd Cavalry Division on September 8th towards the Woëvre, so as to protect the rear of the Third Army. On the 8th, with the same idea in view, I also approved the despatch by rail to Commercy of a mixed brigade taken from the garrison of Toul.

Although the battle had increased in violence along the whole front and now reached beyond the Meuse and well into the Woëvre, I did not lose sight of the armies which were operating between Nancy and the Vosges. I had already taken very important forces from these armies and I proposed to take more if the situation required it. Nevertheless, I had to make sure that such a step would not compromise their power of

<sup>4</sup> The first at 8.30 a.m. and the second at 4.15 p.m.



HEADQUARTERS OF GENERAL JOFFRE AT BAR-SUR-AUBE DURING THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE.



resistance; for in that case the enemy would regain the initiative which we had just snatched from him.

I have related at the opening of this chapter that on the evening of September 5th, General de Castelnau had manifested his intention of abandoning the Grand Couronné and Nancy if he could not maintain his army on its positions without compromising its future. On the 6th, at 1.10 p.m., I sent him a telegram informing him that while his intentions, in case he was forced to abandon the Grand Couronné, met with my approval, I considered it preferable that he hold on to his present positions until a decision was obtained in the battle just commenced.

As it turned out, the commander of the Second Army succeeded that day in checking the enemy's attacks and he was even able to assume the offensive. But on the 7th the situation on his front again became threatening, and General de Castelnau, deeply affected by the death of one of his sons and learning that the battalion charged with defending Mount Sainte-Geneviève had abandoned that position, gave orders to his chief of staff, General Anthoine, to have the retreat begun, while at the same time he made ready to inform the civil authorities of Nancy that they must evacuate the town.

The decision was a grave one. This was no moment for giving the Germans the chance to trumpet to the world that they had taken Nancy. Moreover, from a strategic point of view, the retreat of the Second Army would place the First in a serious dilemma. Either that army would imitate the Second and fall back in liaison with it, thus abandoning the Franche-Comté and making probable the envelopment of the right flank of our armies, or else it would continue its resistance, basing itself for that purpose on the fortified towns of Belfort and Epinal. But this would mean the rupture of our two right armies, with the additional prospect of seeing Dubail's army shortly backed up against the Swiss frontier.

Fortunately, before sending out these orders, General Anthoine, fully appreciating their gravity, telephoned to G.H.Q. to announce the decision just taken. I immediately had de Castelnau called to the telephone. I remember this incident all the more exactly as I very rarely used the telephone myself during the whole campaign. The General drew a very dark picture of the situation of his army. There had been serious lapses in one of the corps; whole bodies of troops had become disbanded. "If I try to hold on where I am," he added, "I feel that my army will be lost. We have got to face the idea of immediately retreating behind the Meurthe."

"Do nothing of the kind," I replied. "Wait twenty-four hours. You do

not know how things are going with the enemy. He is probably no better off than you are. You must not abandon the Grand Couronné and I give you formal orders to hold on to your present positions."

I then gave Major Bel instructions to proceed immediately to General de Castelnau, confirm the verbal order I had just given him, delay the execution of the retreat that was in preparation, and have him hold on in front of Nancy at any cost.

As it turned out, moreover, if Mount Sainte-Geneviève had been evacuated, it was in no sense due to the enemy's action but because of a misunderstanding of orders, and the position had been immediately re-occupied. The German attacks diminished in violence little by little from this day forward, and on September 11th, abandoning his attempt against Nancy at the very moment that our victory on the Marne was being concluded, the enemy marked a considerable retirement in Lorraine; and this was continued during the following days.

During all this period General Dubail had maintained an unshakable confidence, not once did his morale weaken and he never failed punctually to execute my orders.

We will now return to the armies on the left, which we last saw on the evening of September 7th oriented in the directions I had prescribed for them. On the 8th Maunoury found himself at grips with an enemy who had become still further reinforced during the night and who by a daring manœuvre sought to recover the initiative by attempting to envelop our extreme left.

Fortunately, the IV Corps, which I had previously withdrawn from the Third Army, had begun to detrain at Paris on the 5th, and General Gallieni during the night of the 7th/8th sent one of its divisions (the 7th) to Maunoury. To accelerate its movement and enable the troops to reach the Sixth Army in as fresh a condition as possible, Gallieni made use of every available means of transport—railways, requisitioned motor-cars, etc. The other division of the IV Corps (the 8th), the Governor of Paris, in full agreement with Maunoury, thought himself obliged to engage south of the Marne, in order to support closely the movement of the British Army. As a matter of fact, this division was wholly useless in this region, and on the morning of the 8th it was still on the Petit Morin, where it was doing nothing at all. For this reason, about 9 a.m. of that day, I suggested to Maunoury that it would be advantageous to withdraw this division from his right and move it to his left, where there was work for it to do and where it could join the other elements of its corps.

During the morning of this same day, the 8th, I received the distressing

news that Maubeuge had fallen the previous day. I had just cited in orders its Governor, General Fournier, for his gallant defence of the place, but the radio did not reach the besieged town until after its surrender. This event came at a bad moment; for it would free at least one army corps, which the Germans could move rapidly to Montdidier or Anizy. Therefore, when I informed Maunoury of this news I directed him to send out Sordet's cavalry to cut the enemy's communications, especially in the direction of Soissons and Compiègne.

At the end of the day, the Sixth Army, far from having succeeded in moving forward, was painfully resisting on its positions, at the same time making ready to refuse its left; which von Kluck was pressing vigorously. Fortunately, the Fifth Army continued its victorious advance. Its right gave a firm point of support to Foch, its centre, overcoming the resistance of the enemy's rear-guards, was arriving on the Petit Morin, while its left corps (XVIII) had Marchais-en-Brie.

Between Maunoury and Franchet d'Esperey, the British Army was not advancing as rapidly as I could have wished, although it had already attained appreciable results. On September 7th I had requested the Minister of War to express to Lord Kitchener my warmest thanks for the constant support which the British forces had brought to our armies, and I also sent a personal letter to French to tell him of my gratitude. He answered the same day, thanking me for my message and adding that the situation now presented itself very favourably; he also congratulated me upon the "happy combination" I had just achieved.

All this did not prevent me from being impatient to see the British Army get forward more rapidly. Three times during the day of September 8th I urged upon its commander-in-chief the importance I attached to its action; I insisted upon the need of marching as fast as possible to the assistance of the Sixth Army, which now had to bear the whole brunt of the German First Army's attack; and I expressed the hope that I would see the British emerging on the other bank of the Marne before the day was over. But Sir John replied that German rear-guards had checked him on the Petit Morin; that same evening he had only reached the heights which lay to the north of this river.

When night arrived on the 8th, the situation, on the whole, appeared very promising—very different, indeed, from what a few days before I had thought it possible to anticipate.

All the German attacks between the Vosges and the Meuse had been mastered, in spite of the heavy withdrawals I had made from the First and Second Armies; in the centre, the frontal attacks being conducted



by the Fourth and Ninth Armies now gave me a right to hope that the enemy would not succeed in breaking this portion of our front. De Langle's right was at last buttressed by the XV Corps which had just come into action on Sarraill's left. It is true that Foch's right had again yielded ground, a fact which greatly disturbed me; for de Langle was not yet in a position to give him efficient help. But the splendid courage and unshakable confidence of the man at the head of the Ninth Army made me feel certain that the yielding of his line was only a local accident, whose influence upon the engagement as a whole would not be greatly felt.

It is simple justice to do honour here to the exceptional qualities displayed by General Foch during this battle; for throughout its course he gave the full measure of his ability. Admirably assisted by his chief of staff, Colonel Weygand, at no instant did his activity slacken or the inspiration of his morale abate.

On our left wing, the manœuvre I had at first prepared was now becoming wholly changed in character. General Maunoury had been obliged to renounce the envelopment of his energetic adversary; but the latter had only succeeded in parrying our attack against his right by opening between his left and von Bülow's army a breach into which Franchet d'Esperey's left was pushing like a wedge, and into which I was making my strongest efforts to thrust the British. The information sent in by air reconnaissances, and that furnished by identifications secured during the battle, made me realize the extraordinary possibilities of action which this new situation opened up. Therefore, at 7 p.m., I sent to the three armies on our left a Special Instruction whose object was to explain to them the manœuvre I desired to accomplish. The following are its most essential passages:<sup>5</sup>

The combined efforts of the Allied armies composing our left wing have obliged the German forces to fall back; this they have done in two distinct groups.

The first group which appears to be composed of the IV Reserve Corps and the II and IV Active Corps, is fighting on the Ourcq, facing west, against our Sixth Army; it is even trying to outflank this army on the north.

The other group, comprising the rest of the German First Army (III and IX Active Corps), and the entire Second and Third Armies, continues to oppose, facing south, the French Fifth and Ninth Armies.

The connection between these two groups appears to be maintained solely by several cavalry divisions supported by detachments of all arms; these are opposite the British forces.

<sup>5</sup> Special Instruction No. 19.

It seems essential to crush the German extreme right before it can be reinforced by troops which will be made available by the fall of Maubeuge.

I therefore requested:

(a) The Sixth Army to hold in check the enemy forces facing it;  
(b) The British Army to cross the Marne between Nogent l'Artaud and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and attack the left and rear of von Kluck's army;

(c) The Fifth Army, while covering with its left the right flank of the British (aided in this task by Conneau's cavalry), and also continuing to support with its right the left flank of Foch's army, which was making ready to assume the offensive, to move forward with its main body, faced to the north, and drive the enemy across the Marne.

The first paragraph of this Instruction described the situation in a way which would now be recognized as exact, except in one particular: the III and IV German Corps had been identified during the day's fighting, and the Special Instruction places them as being still facing the Fifth Army; in reality they were already on the move towards the Ourcq front.<sup>6</sup> The breach opened up between von Kluck and von Bülow was therefore even wider than I had imagined.

The 9th of September seems to have marked the culminating point in the effort made by the enemy to extricate himself from the situation in which he had become involved.

Our Sixth Army succeeded at first in holding on to its positions; in the neighbourhood of Betz the enemy had even marked a slight withdrawal and had evacuated this village. But during the afternoon the German III and IX Corps, debouching from the north-east and from the north, caused the French left to yield and forced it back to the line Chèvreville-Silly-le-Long. Maunoury immediately recalled the 8th Division, as I had directed him to do, and pushed it by a night march towards the left of his army. On my side, I had occupied myself during the morning with the selection of an infantry division to be furnished by the Fifth Army and which I caused to be sent by rail with the utmost speed towards Dommartin-en-Goële. In notifying General Maunoury of the despatch of this division, I explained the attitude I expected him to observe: "While waiting for the arrival of reinforcements intended to

<sup>6</sup> The following radio, sent by von Kluck at 6.30 p.m., September 8th, was deciphered a few days later by the Code Section of French G.H.Q.: Today the Army fought a hard engagement against superior enemy forces west of the Ourcq, on the line Antilly (2 miles east of Betz)—Cougis (south of Lizy). The III and IX Corps, sent during the night to the right wing, will make an enveloping attack tomorrow morning. On the Marne, the line Lizy-Nogent l'Artaud will be defended by the II Corps of Cavalry and a reinforced brigade of infantry against attacks coming from the direction of Coulommiers.

enable you to resume the offensive, you must avoid any decisive action, by retiring your left wing, if necessary, in the general direction of the Entrenched Camp of Paris."

However, in spite of the violence of the attacks delivered against him, Maunoury never for a moment lost sight of his mission or gave up the idea of resuming the offensive. This is shown in the telegram he sent me after his left had effected its withdrawal: "I will place the 8th Division near Silly-le-Long, and I will then give orders to attack. Heavy losses during the four days' fighting. Morale good. Have sent cavalry well forward."

The stubbornness of the combats delivered by the Sixth Army, the effort demanded of the men, the tenacity and coolness of their chief, secured to us the immense result of making the victorious advance of Sir John French and Franchet d'Esperey comparatively easy. I personally expressed my satisfaction to General Maunoury and to his army, and the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour marked the high price I placed upon the services just rendered our country by the commander of the Sixth Army.

In the report from which a few lines have just been quoted, Maunoury referred to a new task which had been confided to the Cavalry Corps. This force, composed of three divisions, was admirably placed on our extreme left and it should have done most useful work. Unfortunately, although the war had been going on scarcely a month, Sordet's cavalry had arrived at a most distressing state of exhaustion. The more or less useless raid it had made into Belgium, followed by a retreat which only came to an end to the south-west of Paris, had resulted in enormous wear and tear; but the operations alone were not responsible for ruining this corps—the generals and their staffs had a large share in the matter. It thus came about that on September 7th General Sordet, after having put his corps into action in the vicinity of Betz, decided that night, under pretext that the region where he was operating was short of water, to recall his divisions to Nanteuil-le-Housouin, where they arrived only at midnight. Upon learning of this retirement, General Maunoury ordered Sordet to move again to the front, and in this way the corps, after a rest of barely one hour, had to go all the way back over the same road.

Upon the recommendation of the commander of the Sixth Army, I decided to relieve General Sordet of his command and replace him by General Bridoux who was then commanding the 5th Cavalry Division. I had great esteem for Sordet, and before hostilities broke out he gave

evidence of qualities which justified my confidence. Most probably he was a victim of the fact that during the years which preceded the war the cavalry arm had not kept sufficiently abreast of the times. General Bridoux was an officer full of dash and with him at its head the Cavalry Corps would have rendered us the greatest services; but unfortunately he had been in command hardly a day when he was killed. While making a journey one night by motor-car, a mistaken direction caused him and his staff to run into an enemy outpost; General Bridoux was mortally wounded and several of his officers were either killed or wounded at his side. His death was a calamity.

As I had directed him to do on September 8th, General Maunoury tried to push out the Cavalry Corps for the purpose of threatening the right and rear of von Kluck and delay the entry into action of the enemy forces which the fall of Maubeuge had set free; unfortunately the condition of men and horses made it impossible to fulfil this mission. The only thing accomplished was by the division commanded by General Cornulier-Lucinière, which succeeded in creating some confusion in von Kluck's rear and came near capturing (so it seems) the commander of the German First Army and all his staff.

After having been halted in the neighbourhood of La Ferté-sous-Jouarre by a broken bridge, the British Army, on the evening of September 9th, succeeded in gaining a foothold on the north shore of the Marne between La Ferté and Château-Thierry, held by the Fifth Army. This advance menaced the rear of the left wing of von Kluck's army which was now furiously assailing Maunoury.

Franchet d'Esperey's left had continued its forward progress. His XVIII Corps was moving towards Viffort, halfway between the Petit Morin and Château-Thierry. At 2 p.m. I had an order telephoned urging him to push to the Marne: "It is imperative that the XVIII Corps cross the Marne this evening in the vicinity of Château-Thierry, so as to support energetically the British columns." That night, September 9th, this corps did succeed in installing its advanced posts on the northern side of the river. On its left, Conneau's cavalry had also pushed over a brigade. When night arrived the rest of the Fifth Army found itself south of Surmelin, between Condé-en-Brie and Baye. The corps on the right (X), placed at Foch's disposal by Franchet d'Esperey, brought needed relief to the Ninth Army, at that time seriously pressed along its whole front. In his evening report of the day's operations, the commander of the Fifth Army announced himself quite ready to begin an action

against the flank of the German forces which were assailing the Ninth Army.

Taken all in all, while the manœuvre which I had prescribed for September 9th in Special Instruction No. 19 had not as yet been fully executed, its development was proceeding satisfactorily. The retirement of the Sixth Army's left wing was not a serious matter. General Maunoury was cool and confident and he would soon have new forces at his disposal which would permit him to resume his offensive. The British Army and the left of our Fifth were commencing to debouch on the other side of the Marne and, like a wedge, were now penetrating into the space between the German First and Second Armies.

In a new Special Instruction<sup>7</sup> issued during the evening of the 9th, I announced the results so far obtained and the movements to be effected: the Sixth Army, its right resting on the Ourcq, was to push von Kluck towards the north, whilst the British, supported by the Fifth Army, would march to Clignon and thus complete the separation of von Kluck from the army on his left.

Meantime the frontal engagement continued uninterruptedly. The manœuvre effected by General Foch on September 9th is well known. In response to his request for assistance, Franchet d'Esperey had placed at his complete disposal the X Corps and the 51st Reserve Division. Foch sent the X Corps to the west of Champaubert, between the Petit Morin and Fromentières and relieved the 42nd Division, forming the left of his army, by the 51st Reserve Division. Having thus provided himself with a reserve, he moved the 42nd Division in rear of his centre with orders to make ready to attack in the direction of Fère-Champenoise; then at 4 p.m. he gave orders for his whole line to advance. The II Corps was only able to make a commencement of the movement; the 42nd Division arrived too late to get into action before night fell; the X Corps alone, moving to the north of the Saint-Gond marshes, began to drive the enemy back, while at the same time the 77th Infantry Regiment retook the important point of support constituted by the Château de Mondemont.

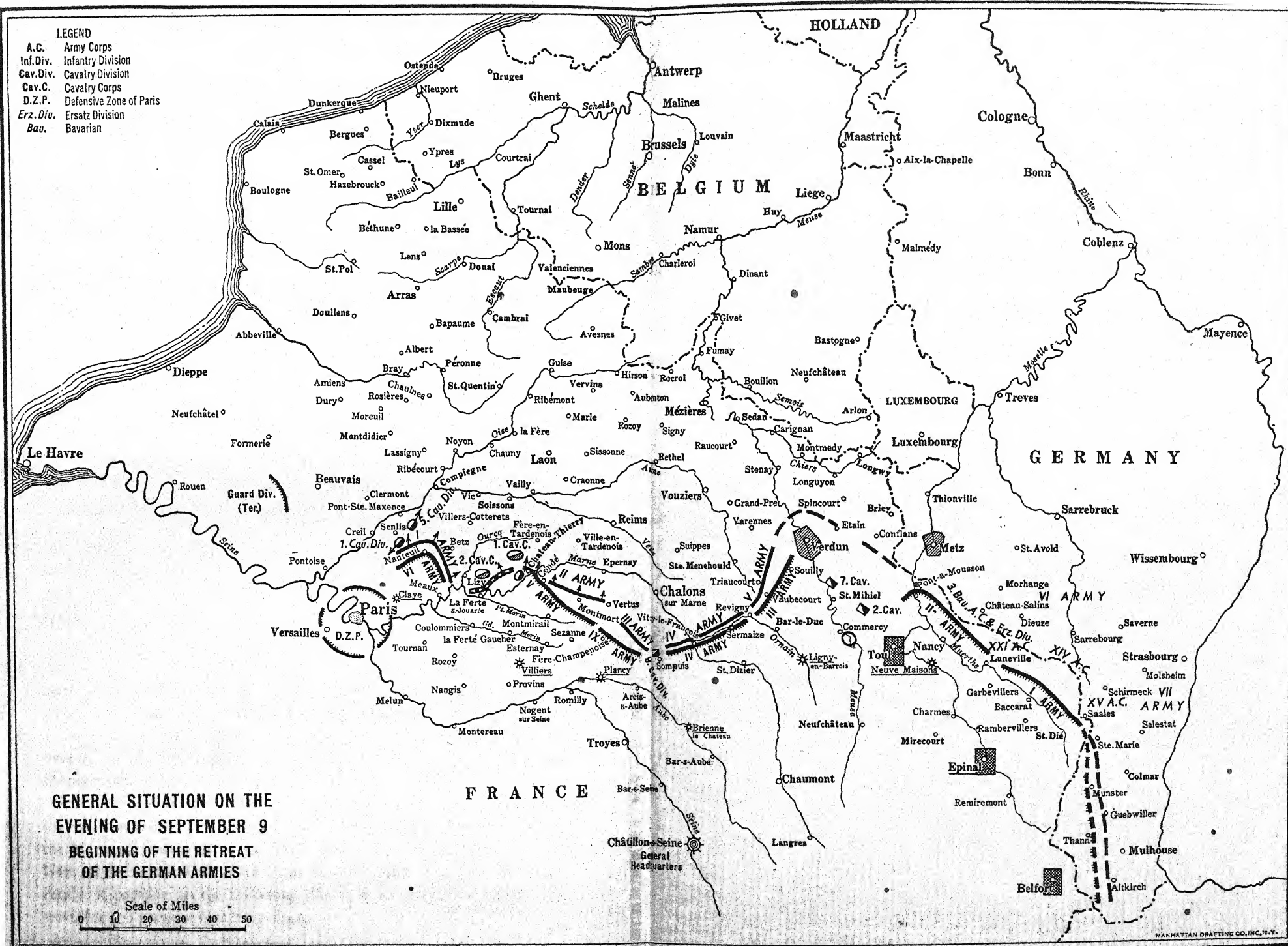
In the Fourth Army, the situation likewise improved. The violence of the German attacks on its right and centre weakened visibly; west of the Marne, the entrance into action of the XXI Corps and elements which General de Langle had taken from his two right corps, was destined to render it possible on the following day to make an attack facing north-west, for the purpose of aiding Foch.

<sup>7</sup> Special Instruction No. 20, September 9, 1914, 8 p.m.

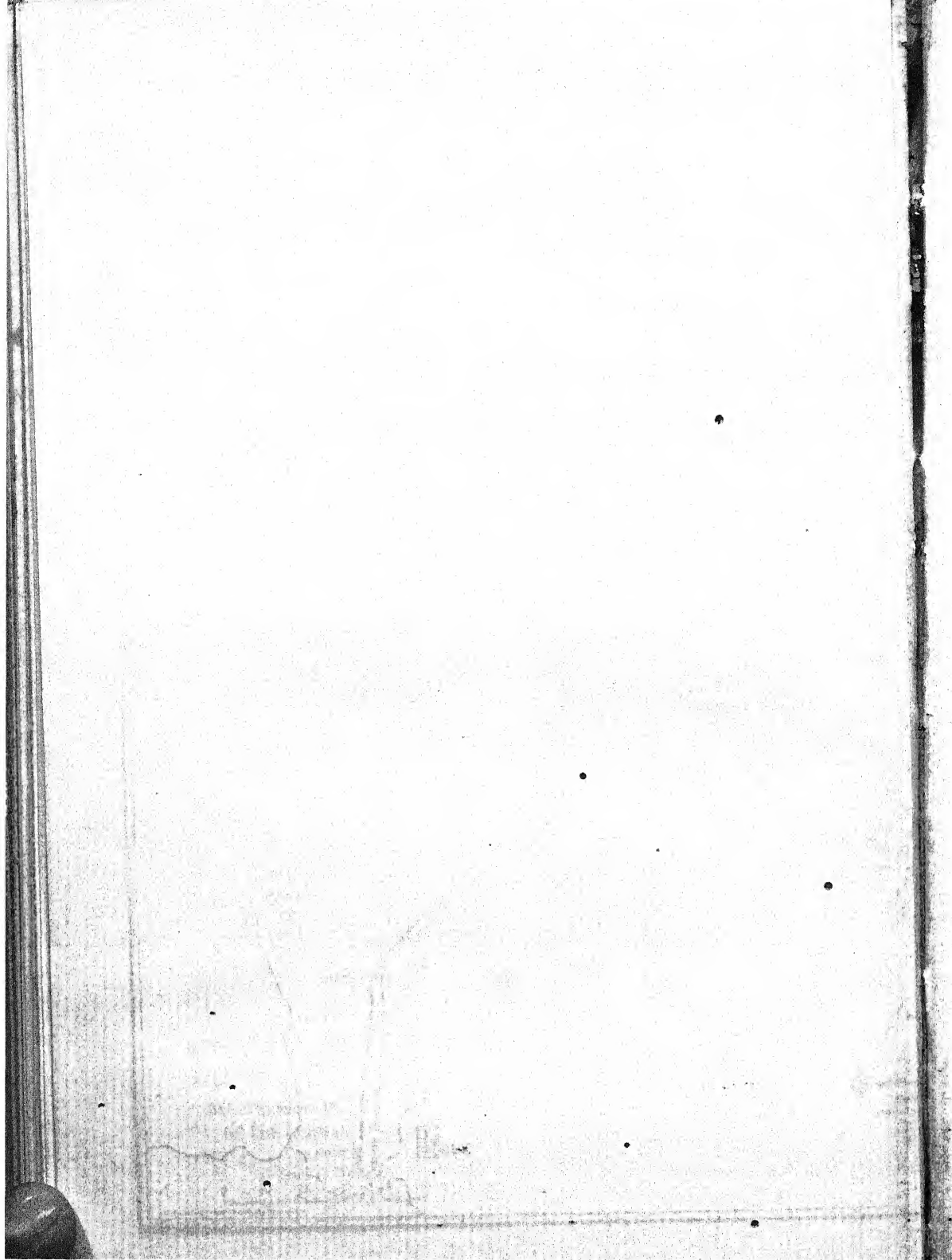




<b>A.C.</b>	<b>Army Corps</b>
<b>Inf.Div.</b>	<b>Infantry Division</b>
<b>Cav.Div.</b>	<b>Cavalry Division</b>
<b>Cav.C.</b>	<b>Cavalry Corps</b>
<b>D.Z.P.</b>	<b>Defensive Zone of Paris</b>
<b>Erz.Div.</b>	<b>Ersatz Division</b>
<b>Bav.</b>	<b>Bavarian</b>



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In Sarraill's army the fighting went on without the enemy being able to gain any ground; on the left of this army, the XV Corps was moving in close conjunction with de Langle's right. During the night of September 9th/10th the Germans launched a violent attack against the front of the VI Corps; this offensive, definitely checked the next morning, marked the end of their efforts against the Third Army.

On the Meuse the enemy vainly continued his attempts. Troyon did not allow itself to be intimidated by the German bombardment, while the screen furnished by the 7th Cavalry Division, the presence of the 2nd Cavalry Division on the right bank near Saint-Mihiel as well as the provisional brigade which Castelnau had sent from Toul towards Commercy, proved sufficient to cover the rear of Sarraill's army.

By the evening of September 9th, therefore, I was justified in considering the situation as favourable: on the left our success had become pronounced while in the centre and on the right the enemy's rush appeared to be definitely checked. But Victory was closer than I had dared to hope for.

On the morning of the 10th, as the Sixth Army moved out to make the attack prescribed in my Instruction of the preceding evening, all of a sudden it felt the enemy's resistance give way and during this day it advanced over nine miles almost without firing a shot.

On its right, the British Army reached Clignon without meeting resistance, and at the close of the day it halted south of the Ourcq, from La Ferté-Milon to Neuilly-Saint-Front.

The Fifth Army was across the Marne from Château-Thierry to Dormans, and General Franchet d'Esperey reported to me that in front of him the enemy's retreat was becoming precipitate, part of his forces moving towards the north, part towards the east.

On the line of the Ninth Army likewise, our success began to be manifest. The general advance which Foch had undertaken to effect the day before was now gaining impetus and all went to show that, here also, the enemy had effected a precipitate retreat during the night. For the evening of the 10th, Foch established his headquarters at Fère-Champenoise which the Prussian Guard had held that very morning.

In front of the Fourth and Third Armies the situation still remained stationary. Instead of de Langle's left being able to work for the benefit of the Ninth Army, as I had hoped would be the case, it was the latter which found itself in a position to aid the army on its right. Opposite Sarraill the enemy's activity lessened still further, and the XV Corps

having finished the cleaning up of the forest of Trois Fontaines, now held position abreast of the right corps of the Fourth Army.

What now remained to be done was to follow up the success achieved by our left and centre and at the same time overcome the resistance which continued to hold up our two armies on the right. To this effect I sent out a series of orders on September 10th with the object of giving a fresh impetus to the battle.

To French and Maunoury I made the request that they push straight to the north on each side of the Ourcq; on their extreme left, Bridoux's Cavalry Corps was to endeavour constantly to threaten the enemy's lines of retreat, and on their right the Fifth Army was so to place itself as to be able to act, *facing east*, in the direction of Rheims, against the columns which were retreating before the Ninth Army.<sup>8</sup>

To General Foch I pointed out that the result of the battle would depend in a large measure on the action of his army against the corps facing our Fourth Army.<sup>9</sup>

To General de Langle, I urged the necessity of a vigorous advance especially on his left.<sup>10</sup>

To General Sarraill I telegraphed that I only expected him to hold fast where he stood.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to this, I made every effort to threaten the two flanks of the retreating enemy—his right, by sending a radio message to General Coutanceau, Military Governor of Verdun, to attack with all his forces any enemy convoys which crossed the Meuse north of Verdun, and his left, by pushing General d'Amadés Territorial Divisions to the region of Beauvais.<sup>12</sup>

I also telegraphed the First Army to entrain the XII Corps at Epinal and send it to the north of Paris; for my whole attention was now concentrated upon the necessity of preventing the enemy from recovering himself, and to ensure this I desired to reinforce still further General Maunoury's army, which I considered to be the principal factor in our manœuvre.

That evening I had the certainty of victory, although I was as yet unable to measure its full extent. I reported to the Minister of War the first results, namely, on my left, the enemy in full retreat having already

<sup>8</sup> Special Instruction No. 21 of September 10th, afternoon.

<sup>9</sup> Special Order of September 10th, morning.

<sup>10</sup> Special Order of September 10th, 10 a.m.

<sup>11</sup> Special Order of September 10th, 10.10 a.m.

<sup>12</sup> Special Order of September 9th.

yielded more than 37 miles; his centre weakening in front of Foch; his left, while not yet beaten, at the end of their resistance.

On September 11th, our victory became confirmed along the whole of the line. The Sixth Army had reached the front Pierrefond-Chandun; the British were crossing the upper Ourcq; Franchet d'Esperey, driving before him the weak rear-guards of the enemy, had pushed the heads of his columns south of the Vesle between Chéry and Ville-en-Tardenois; his right corps, the X, which had so powerfully contributed to Foch's success, was moving from Vertus towards Epernay, while the Ninth Army itself was on the Marne between Sarry and Tours. The Fourth Army also was now advancing. Its left, during the night, had reached the Marne below Vitry, its right, the Colonial Corps, occupied the bridges over the Saulx and the II Corps those over the Ornain, in close touch with the left of the Third Army, which itself was in the act of crossing the last-named river. The remainder of Sarraill's army was not making any headway, but at the close of the day a report from his staff stated that an "impressive calm" reigned along the whole of their front.<sup>13</sup>

That afternoon I telegraphed as follows to the Minister of War: "The Battle of the Marne is an incontestable victory for us." Before writing out this bulletin, the question arose as to the name which should be given to the battle we had just won.

In former times an engagement drew its name from the place near which it had been fought or the spot where the decisive action had taken place. But in modern battles, extending as they do over immense fronts, on which numerous actions of equal importance take place simultaneously, the name of some one locality is no longer sufficiently characteristic.

During the fighting in Manchuria the belligerents had several times been led to give to a battle the name of the river whose valley had been the scene of the encounter. The battle which the Allied forces had just fought on the front running from Verdun to Paris had taken place in the Valley of the Marne and its affluents,—the Ourcq, the Grand Morin, the Petit Morin, the Saulx and the Ornain. It was this fact which decided me to call it the Battle of the Marne; for this term evoked both the idea of a front and of an extensive region.

<sup>13</sup> I must confess that this report from the Third Army, which, if I remember correctly, was telephoned personally by Colonel Leboucq, chief of staff of this army, caused me the greatest astonishment and excited my liveliest displeasure. At a moment when the enemy showed clearly that he considered himself beaten along the whole line, here was the Third Army, perfectly placed for clinching the victory, satisfied with merely announcing—through fear of some vaguely suspected trap—that entire calm reigned along its front! I immediately gave orders for this army to commence an energetic pursuit of the enemy.



As I have already said at the opening of this chapter, the Battle of the Marne, which began on our side with a manœuvre that sought to envelop the enemy's right wing, was brought to a finish by the rupture of the adverse formation, in which two breaches had been opened, one between the German First and Second Armies, the other between the Second and Fourth armies—the Third Army itself having become broken into two fractions, which had united with von Bülow's left and the Prince of Württemberg's right respectively. It was this unexpected situation of which we took advantage; and this fact confirms what I have said above, that a doctrine which consists in abandoning to subordinate commanders the strategic direction of a battle is a most dangerous one.

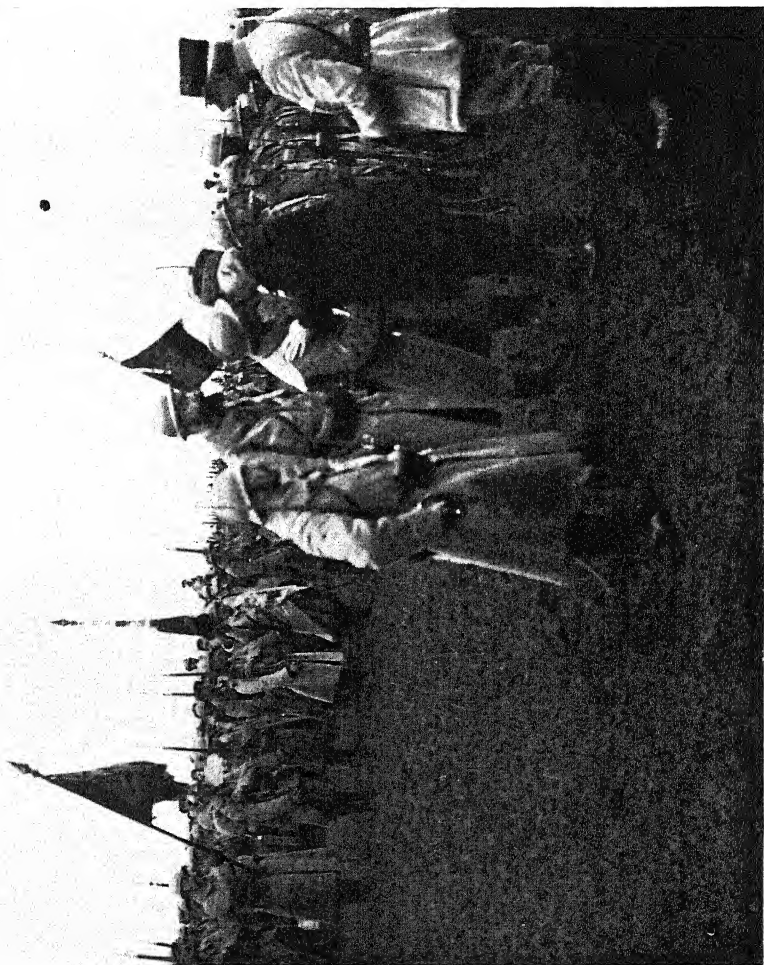
On the other hand, if we compare the Battle of the Marne with the Battle of the Frontiers, it will be seen that the two had a close relation to each other. If, on the Ourcq, Maunoury's army had faltered as did our armies of the left on the 22nd of August, if Foch had given way at Fère-Champenoise, as did our Third and Fourth Armies at Audun-le-Roman and at Paliseul, my plan would have crumbled to pieces a second time.

If our success on the Marne responded to my expectations, the reason in great part lies in the fact that our armies at the commencement of September were no longer what they were during the first days of the war. Taught by the hard experience of the battles on the frontier, our infantry, although it had lost many of its officers, employed the ground to better advantage and more willingly used its entrenching tools whose value the men now fully comprehended; and it no longer went into action without being supported by artillery. It is also true that many of the generals whose incapacity the war had suddenly revealed, had been replaced by other and more capable men. Between the day when the Army was mobilized and the 6th of September, I had been obliged to remove two army commanders (the Third and the Fifth), nine army corps commanders (out of a total of twenty-one), thirty-three infantry division commanders,<sup>14</sup> one cavalry corps commander and five cavalry division commanders (out of a total of ten divisions). Even if I did not go so far as to adopt the radical measures contemplated by M. Messimy and have the incapable shot, it can at least be said that these changes weeded out the higher commands and rejuvenated the list of general officers.

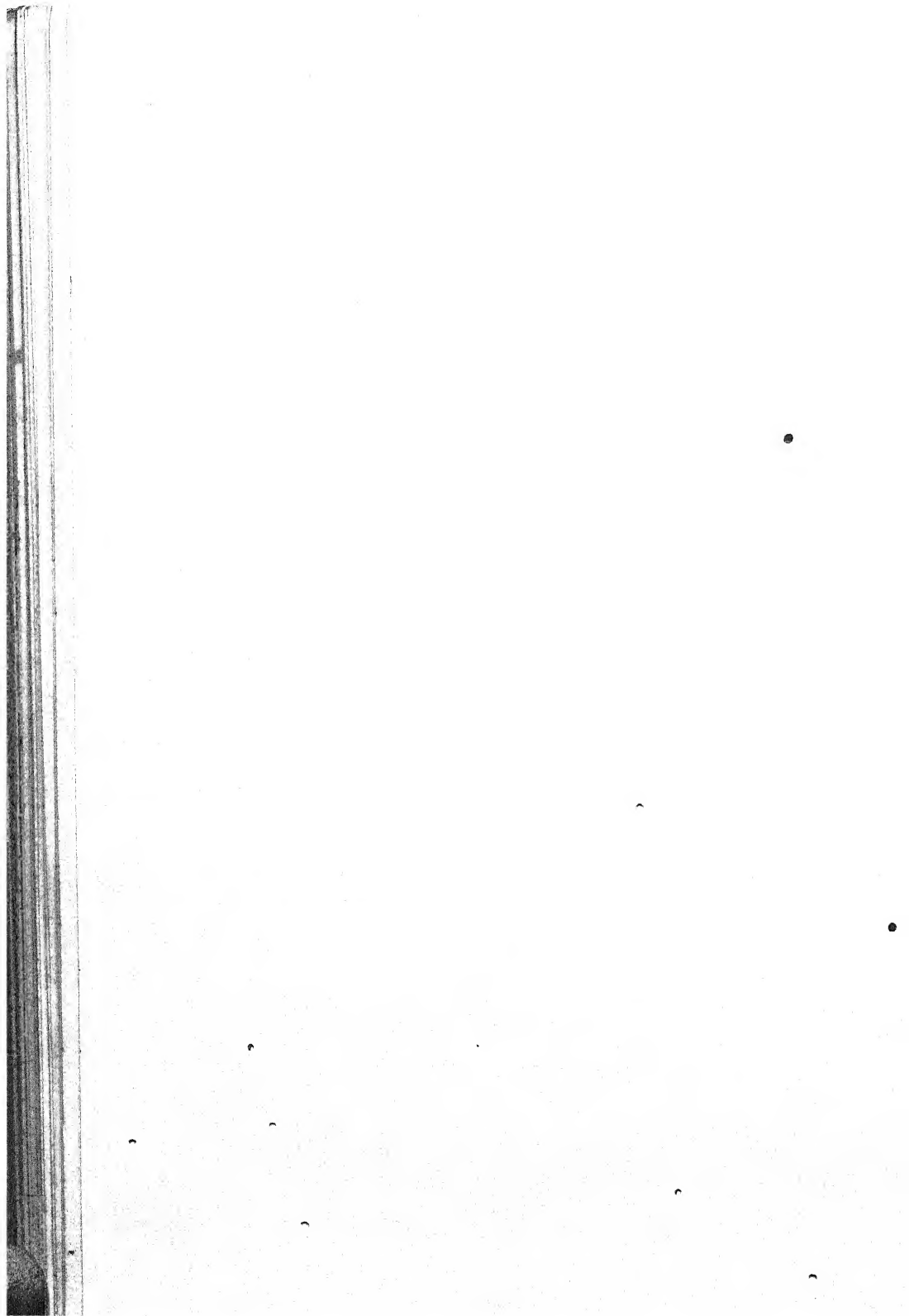
The British, like ourselves, had also profited by the hard lessons of

<sup>14</sup> Twenty-three generals commanding active divisions out of forty-seven (including the two colonial divisions), and ten commanding reserve divisions, out of twenty-five.





GENERAL JOFFRE DECORATING A SOLDIER.



the opening days of the struggle. With the exception of the Crimean War, they had never fought in Europe since Waterloo, and the gap was a huge one. If, during the Battle of the Marne, they did not advance as fast as I would have liked—and as they doubtless could have done in view of the weak forces the Germans had left in front of them—their conduct in this battle was in every way worthy of their military traditions, and the rôle they played in it was what I would have expected of them.

Now that our manœuvre on the Marne had been crowned with success, Sir John French, loyal soldier that he was, showed in every way his confidence. Unfortunately, he was rent between two influences: the one was represented by General Wilson, a man of the keenest intelligence, with a sound appreciation of every situation, and, in addition, accustomed to French methods and thoroughly knowing France—for which country, indeed, he had a profound sentiment; the other was represented by General Murray, chief of staff of the Expeditionary Forces, who spent his time exhorting the Field Marshal with counsels of extreme prudence. It was a great relief to us when, a few months later, General Murray was called back to England.

#### THE PURSUIT AFTER THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

By the evening of September 11th the enemy was yielding along the whole front, abandoning provisions, material and wounded. In front of the Sixth Army and the British Army he was escaping towards the north, evidently seeking to put the Aisne between him and his victorious adversaries. The German VII Corps, which during the battle had formed the right wing of von Bülow's army, was reported on the Vesle between Fismes and Braine, facing our Fifth Army; in front of the Ninth and Fourth Armies the enemy was falling back to the north of the Marne and the Saulx.

Berthelot, having now recovered his optimism—which towards the end of August had abandoned him for a moment—already saw the German Armies hopelessly beaten. In his opinion all we had to do to exploit our victory was to push ruthlessly forward along the whole line. I did not share this view. We had just achieved an undisputed victory over the German Supreme Command, whose fundamental errors we had turned to good account, but the German Armies were not in rout and we could be sure of finding them reconstituted somewhere beyond the Marne—behind the Aisne or perhaps the Meuse. What we must do, therefore, was to prepare at once a manœuvre which would prevent the

Germans from recuperating. As I have stated above, I had decided again to withdraw forces from our armies of the right and send them to the Sixth Army, in order to give it the means of out-flanking the German right wing. The Fifth Army, moreover, was admirably placed for exploiting the breach which had been produced in the enemy's centre, for it could, according to circumstances, manœuvre either with the combination Maunoury-French or with that constituted by Foch and de Langle.

I informed our left wing armies of my intentions in a Special Instruction sent to them on September 11th. The next day I stimulated General Maunoury by reminding him that his zone of march had no boundaries towards the west and that in case the enemy made a stand on the Aisne we must have forces ready to proceed immediately up the right bank of the Oise; I added that the XIII Corps, which, as has been seen, was placed at the disposal of the Sixth Army, seemed especially indicated to play this important rôle. That same day I again emphasized my orders to the Sixth Army. I requested General Maunoury to extend towards the west his out-flanking movement, leaving merely a strong detachment to maintain touch with the British Army, and progressively to transfer the bulk of his forces to the right bank of the Oise.

At the other extremity of my line an energetic impetus was necessary in order to arouse the right wing from its lethargy. On the 12th of September I indicated to General Sarraill the nature of the manœuvre I expected of him: "It is to be presumed that the enemy forces fronting the Third Army will soon be forced to fall back before the pressure of the Fourth Army. In view of this eventuality you should so dispose your forces as to be able to begin an energetic pursuit towards the north, following the open ground between the Argonne and the Meuse, using as a support the Hauts de Meuse and the fortifications of Verdun."

I am obliged to say that the execution of these instructions did not respond to my intentions.

On the left, General Maunoury failed to comprehend my idea. North of the Aisne he had encountered a resistance which immediately absorbed his attention and his forces, and he seemed incapable of giving his out-flanking movement the necessary amplitude or devoting to it the requisite forces; thus, before long, he found himself diverted into a profitless frontal engagement.

On his side, Franchet d'Esperey did not make the most of the favourable situation in which he found himself. The manœuvre to be executed consisted essentially in a rapid march to the Vesle, which would have

disengaged Rheims and forced the Germans to evacuate the Chemin des Dames, where they were offering a strenuous resistance to the British. The Fifth Army was, of course, tired; as were the others, as armies always are following a dearly bought victory. Without underrating the difficulties which faced him, I am obliged to say that Franchet d'Esperey lost too much time. The gap in the enemy's line which opened up before him and through which elements of our cavalry had pushed as far as Sissonne, now closed up and the adverse front became stabilized in the immediate neighbourhood of Rheims, whose slow destruction began.

Finally, on our right, Sarraill also failed to comprehend the decisive rôle which his army could play under these circumstances. More occupied with questions regarding persons than with the operations of his army he failed vigorously to incite his subordinates to action, and on the afternoon of September 13th, I was obliged to direct him to make an investigation for the purpose of determining how it was that the enemy had been able during forty-eight hours to slip away from in front of his army without his having been informed of what was happening.

And now a grave question began to arise—that of artillery ammunition. It will be remembered that we started the campaign with a total supply of about 1400 rounds per piece for the 75 mm. gun. The consumption which, during the first month of the war, had amounted to only about 200 rounds per piece, had increased to a very great extent during the Battle of the Marne, when some of the divisional artillery fired as much as 300 rounds per gun per day. As early as September 14th I was led to take measures to repress the unfortunate tendency which was spreading of constantly using explosive shell and neglecting shrapnel, a practice which threatened rapidly to exhaust our stocks.

I will return later to this crisis in munitions (which it may be remarked in passing began to be experienced at the same moment by our adversaries); all that I desire to say now is that the stabilization which the Germans managed to effect was not due to our poverty in ammunition, for this only made itself really felt after the enemy had dug himself into well-fortified positions. The real causes of this stabilization were the slowness and lack of manœuvring skill displayed by the two flank armies and the Fifth Army during the short period when our victory was being exploited.

Although the Battle of the Marne did not bring as much as I expected of it, I nevertheless think I am justified in briefly pointing out the main results obtained.

The month of August had given the first game of the rubber to the

Germans; with the Belgians thrown back upon Antwerp, the British and French towards the Seine. Our left wing threatened with envelopment and Paris with capture; there can be small doubt that at this moment the Germans were looking forward to another Sedan repeated on an enormous scale. Our adversaries' plan had as its foundation a rapid victory in the West. The need of winning the war before the resources of Russia could be brought into play was now all the more imperative, since the British Empire had thrown itself into the conflict on our side. As I have said several times in the preceding pages, it would have been playing into the enemy's hands if I had risked the destinies of our country at a moment when the essential thing for us was above all to hold out and avoid destruction. It was this consideration which justified me in waiting for an always possible turn of fortune. I paid for this delay by sacrificing—temporarily, as I hoped—a considerable part of our territory. Although a total defeat of the Germans was not accomplished, nevertheless the occasion we had so patiently waited for did enable us to drive them back along the whole line, and our victory forced them to bury themselves in trenches. What a disappointment for men in a hurry!

But, it can well be said, the result achieved was the primary cause of the final defeat of the Germans, although it was not assigned its true value at the time. Amongst the Allies, and especially in France, after the first immense relief experienced when the menace of dire catastrophe that had hung over the country during the first days of September was seen to be lifted, public opinion, a few days after the victory of the Marne, was conscious of only one thing, and that was that the German army was firmly fastening itself upon our soil. Instead of emphasizing to the public the happy reversal of the situation, the Minister of War softened down the communiqués which I sent him at the close of the battle, before giving them to the press. When I expressed to M. Millerand the pain I felt at seeing these changes, he wrote to me on September 15th as follows:

I alone am guilty; but I do not wish to leave the shadow of a doubt in your mind as to the reasons which induced me to put the soft pedal upon the expression of our joy.

I thought it wise to save the nerves of this country, and I preferred the risk of understating the truth to that of exaggerating it.

M. Millerand's patriotism was too sincere and his feeling for me too genuine for it to be possible to attach to him any suspicion of ungenerous intention; but I cannot help thinking that the Minister of War was,



under the circumstances, too modest in the terms he used to announce our victory. The enemy's propaganda drowned with a tongue of brass the voice of victorious France, not only in neutral countries, but even in our own. For many people, the Marne came to be considered as a sort of miracle; for others, as a happy and unexpected piece of luck. For those persons who received their inspiration from the enemy press, the battle reduced itself to a manœuvre undertaken by the German Supreme Command, which, in the absence of the strategic results it had failed to achieve, from now on invariably pointed to the "war map" as being the argument most easy to comprehend.

Fortunately, the essential fact remained that the enemy had been driven back to a line fifty miles north of Paris and it could be said that he was definitely halted. People breathed once more, and confidence revived.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE AUTUMN CAMPAIGN

#### *The Stabilization of the Western Front*

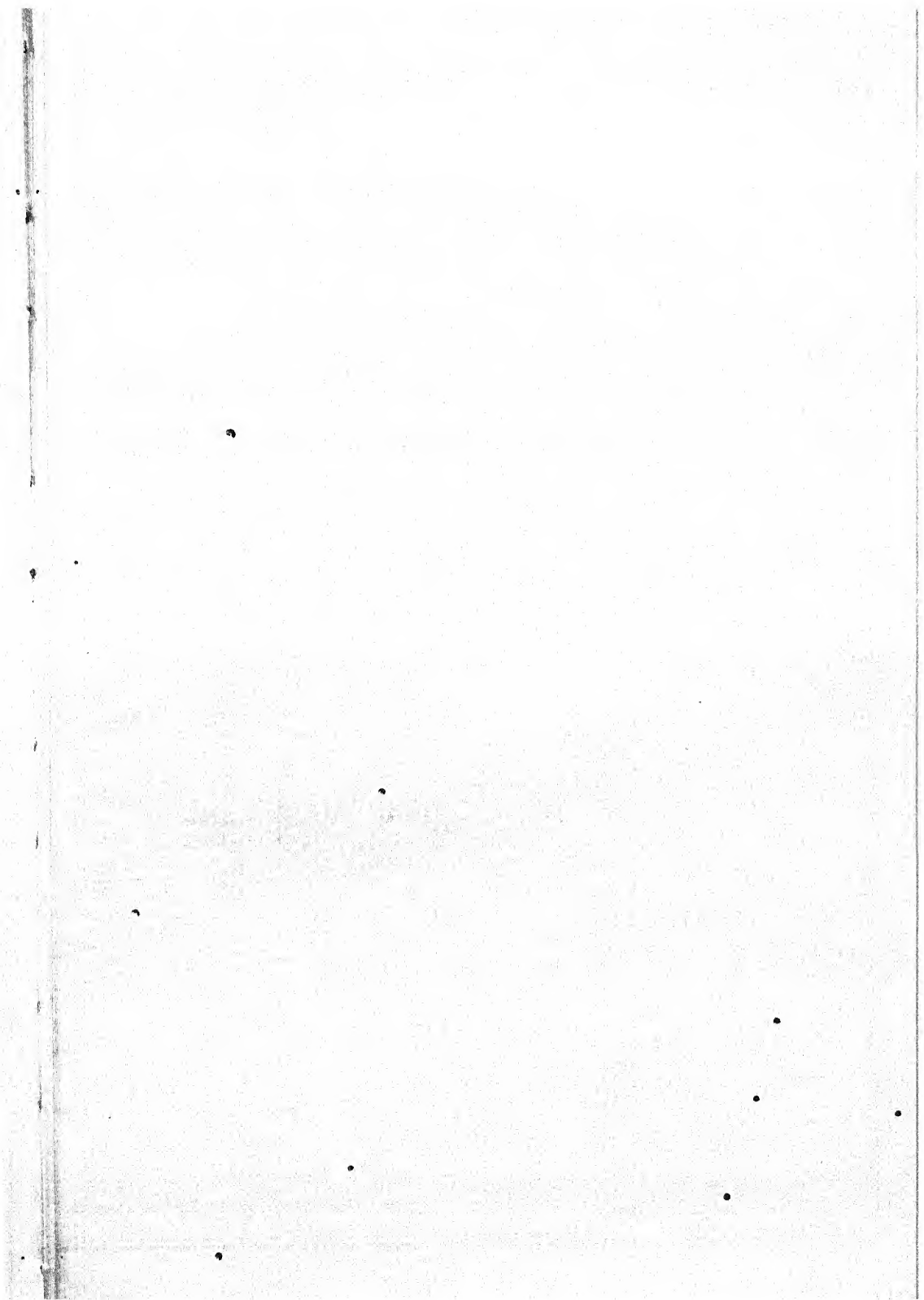
ON SEPTEMBER 14th our armies reported that the enemy was beginning to make a stand on a front running along the heights north of the Aisne, along those dominating Rheims to the north and north-east, and continued by a line passing through Saint-Hilaire, Souain, Ville-sur-Tourbe and Vienne-la-Ville.

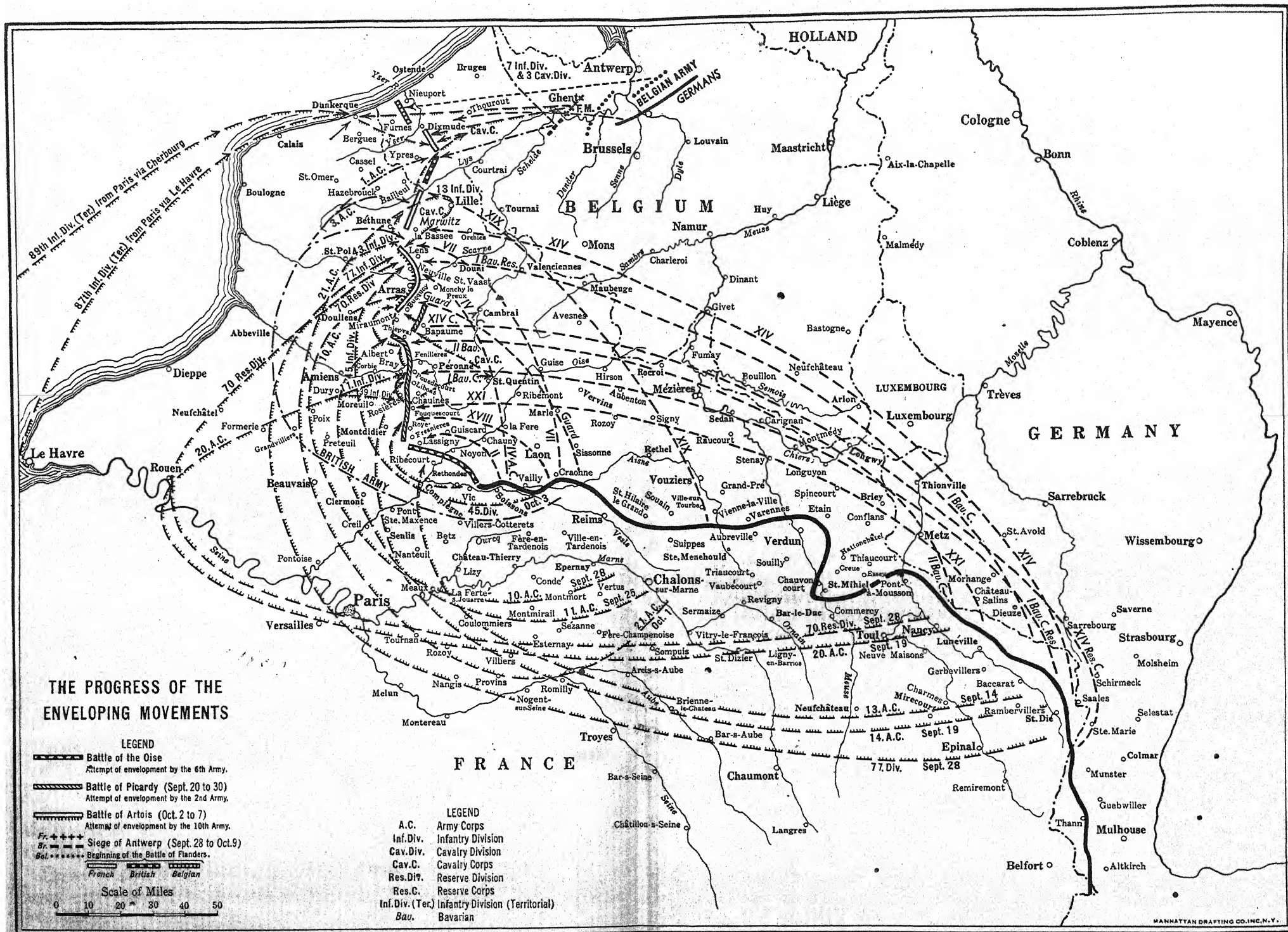
The next morning, the resistance of the Germans became more marked. Our Sixth Army, whose progress was essential if we were to force them to continue their retreat, found itself checked along its whole front; what was still more serious, its left (IV Corps and 37th Division) became engaged on difficult ground in a confused struggle which, when evening came, left our troops in close contact with the enemy. Meanwhile, one division of the XIII Corps which had just detrained was moving up the right bank of the Oise, in the direction of Noyon.

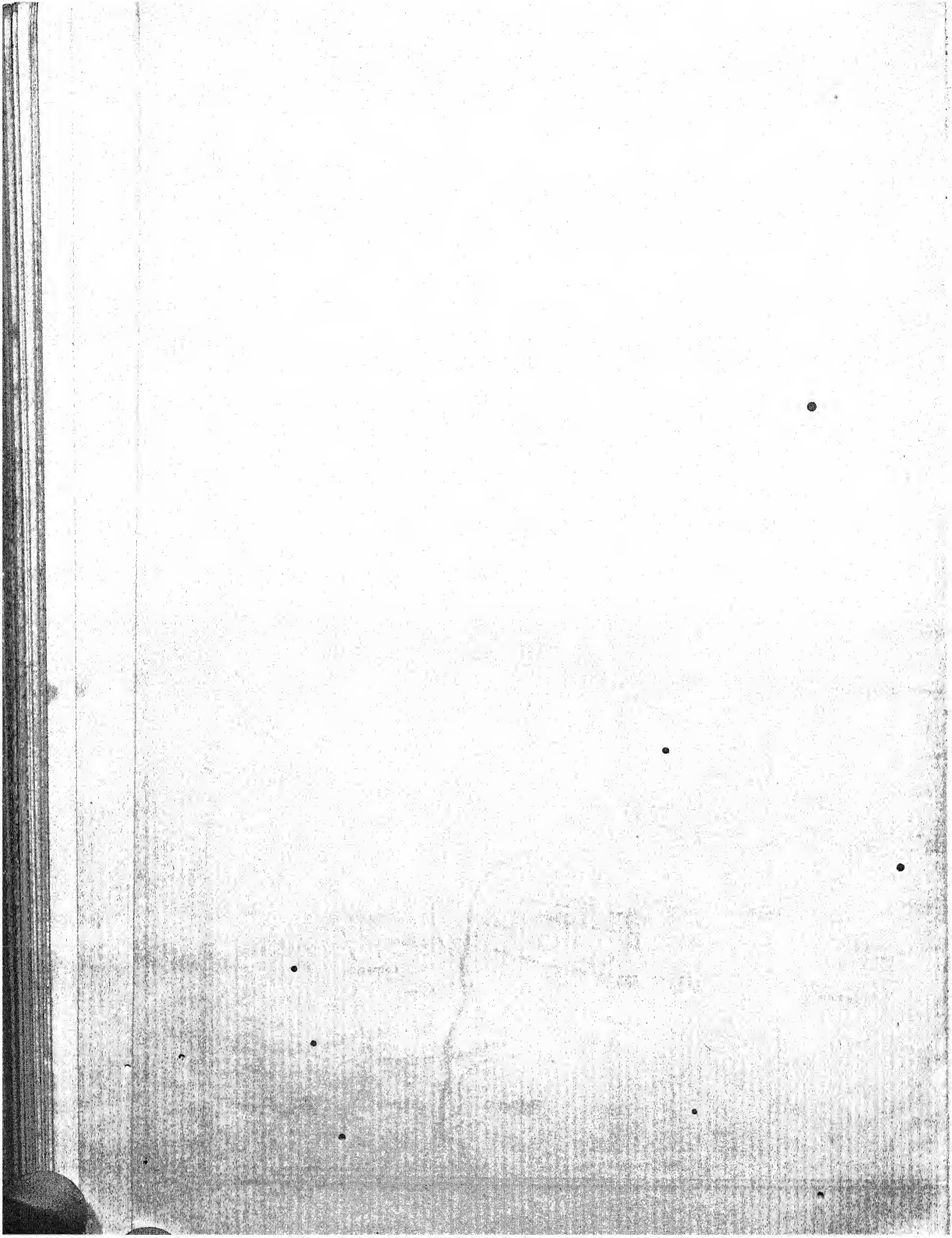
That day I had the distinct impression that the Germans were going to accept a new battle on the line where they now stood. To my mind there could be no question of our beginning a general action, for it would cost us heavy losses and use up most of our ammunition. My intention was, while maintaining an aggressive attitude which would keep the enemy constantly under the threat of a general attack and prevent him from sending forces to strengthen his right wing, to undertake a powerful action with my left against the German right, by means of units which I would withdraw from my centre and right.<sup>1</sup>

But already the very small extension which Maunoury had given to the manœuvre of his left wing had deprived me of any illusions as to the results I could expect from his army, and on September 17th I was led to contemplate constituting on the left of the Sixth Army a new group upon which would fall the task which I had formerly confided to Maunoury.

<sup>1</sup> Special Instruction No. 29, September 17, 1914.







If this manœuvre was to succeed it was essential for the armies directly fronting the enemy to continue to display a great activity and to maintain their positions intact, in spite of the withdrawals I proposed to make from their forces. It was from this moment on that the question of ammunition became agonizing.

Towards the end of September the total stock in the whole army fell to 400 rounds per gun. The supply at the Regulating Stations had entirely given out, the reserve depots had only a small stock (45 rounds per gun), and the production in the arsenals was, at the moment, only between 8000 and 10,000 rounds per day. On September 20th, I addressed a letter to the Minister of War urging him to push this output to 50,000 rounds. The next day I received the following answer:

My dear General,

The manufacture of 75mm. ammunition is the source of no less intense preoccupation to me than to you. Before receiving your letter I had come to the same conclusion as you, namely that we must produce 50,000 rounds a day. But this is impossible under conditions as they now stand.

I, therefore, brought together yesterday representatives of the War and Navy Ministries and of private industry (Saint-Chamond, Le Creusot, the railways, motor-cars, etc.) in order to see how we could reach this figure.

It will not be easy; for it requires time, much time—in spite of undoubted competence and willingness—to gather together the men and the material and get matters going.

However, I do not despair of reaching 30,000 rounds in three weeks; at the most, in four.

In any case, the irons are in the fire. We have a second meeting fixed for Saturday with manufacturers who are going to spend the intervening time in obtaining the necessary co-operation.

I urgently request you, on your side, to take every possible measure to prevent waste where it can be avoided. Please see that fatigue parties gather up the cartridge cases left on the battle-fields, or else offer to pay the inhabitants for all they bring in.

I will ask for the information concerning the British and Russian ammunition situation. Before you get this letter you will have received replies to your various communications. I hope they will be satisfactory to you.

My thoughts are with you all the time and with our wonderful soldiers; my confidence is boundless.

Affectionately yours,

A. MILLERAND<sup>2</sup>

While waiting for the programme which the Minister announced, to go into effect, I took the following measures:

<sup>2</sup> Strictly personal file of the General-in-Chief of the Armies of the East! Folder No. 1, document 45.



I reduced the allowance in the army to 200 rounds per gun; with the rest of the ammunition on hand I constituted a reserve under my personal control, from which I could make allotments to meet unexpected situations.

In several communications sent out to the Army, I gave warning against any wasting of our precious ammunition.

I made levies of 75mm. ammunition upon the stocks allotted to Paris, Havre, Dunkirk and the fortified places in the East.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to these measures, batteries of old model guns were sent to the armies, and this measure, added to the others, enabled us to meet more or less imperfectly their immediate requirements, while at the same time providing for the necessities of the battle which, starting up little by little between the Oise and the Somme, was soon to cross Flanders and extend to the shores of the North Sea.

It is a fact that this poverty in munitions, making itself felt at such a moment, restricted our operations considerably; for in order to furnish what was imperative for the battle going on in the north, we had to let wide portions of the front remain quiescent. This enabled the enemy facing these fronts to work undisturbed at his defensive organizations, which, as they grew in strength, made it possible for him to hold this part of his line more and more economically and to take from it forces with which to oppose the movement of our left wing towards the north. The enemy was also thus left free to effect regroupings intended for local actions against sensitive points of our front.

For example, beginning on September 1st, the German Fifth Army started a powerful offensive on each side of Verdun, which, while it did not accomplish all the results that our adversaries expected from it, had, nevertheless, very unfortunate consequences for us.

Following upon the departure of General de Castelnau, the staff of the Second Army and the XX Corps, called, as I shall relate further on, to a new theatre of operations, I was obliged to make a new assignment of forces and missions as between the First and Third armies.<sup>4</sup> I ordered these two armies, while continuing to fulfil their defensive mission, which consisted in "assuring the security of the right of our line," to "preserve contact with the enemy and keep up an active and menacing attitude, in order to prevent him from reducing his forces in the region to the east of Metz."

<sup>3</sup> In this way we secured about 180,000 rounds.

<sup>4</sup> Special Instruction No. 30, September 18, 1914.

On September 20th, following upon information reporting enemy units to be assembling in the area Joinville-Dampvitoux-Essey-Beney-Thiaucourt, I sent a telegram to General Dubail, commanding the First Army, directing him to use the XVI Corps which was in reserve on his left "with a view to assailing the flank of the enemy troops which are moving to attack the Hauts-de-Meuse or the Commercy gap." At the same time I advised General Sarraill, commanding the Third Army, of these arrangements, and ordered him to take measures to repulse any frontal attack which the enemy might make on him.

That same day the 75th Division, holding the Hauts-de-Meuse near Hattonchâtel was violently bombarded, and the next day fiercely attacked. After a weak resistance, it gave way, and the enemy took possession of Hattonchâtel and Creue.

On the 22nd another German attack, vigorously conducted by two army corps, broke out west of Verdun, in the Argonne, and on the eastern edge of the forest, near Varennes. This new offensive took place at the juncture, not yet firmly established, of the Third and Fourth Armies and at a point where our line of defence was still weakly organized. At the same time that they attacked in the Argonne, the Germans continued their progress towards Saint-Mihiel. In the presence of this situation I restored to General Sarraill the VIII Corps, which I had previously taken from the right of his army and sent towards Sainte-Menehould, where it was intended to form a reserve for opposing any movement by the enemy along the west or the east side of the Argonne. This corps was moved partly by railway and partly by marching, from the region of Sainte-Menehould to that of Saint-Mihiel, and was available by the 24th for reinforcing the right of the Third Army, the one which appeared the more seriously menaced.

In fact, by the 24th the progress of the enemy south of Varennes had been blocked, but on the right bank of the Meuse he had reached the neighbourhood of Saint-Mihiel. That evening, therefore, I directed the commander of the First Army to devote the largest possible force to his offensive in the Woëvre, so as to disengage the Third Army.

On the 25th some units of the Bavarian III Corps, which had obtained a foothold on the left bank of the Meuse, were driven back upon Chauvencourt. The difficulties of communication between the Third Army and those of its elements which were fighting on the right bank induced me to place all the troops operating to the east of the river under General Dubail's orders.

Our attacks continued during the following days; but while they halted the German advance, they failed to regain the lost ground. In this affair the commander of the Third Army was lacking in foresight and activity—in foresight, because he neglected the information which indicated that large concentrations were being effected in the Woëvre; in activity, because he did not make proper use of the VI Corps, one of whose divisions had been garrisoned in time of peace at Saint-Mihiel and knew the ground admirably. This corps, although only a few miles from the battle-field, remained more or less idle during the whole period of the crisis.

The consequences of this German attack were serious. It placed in the enemy's hands at Saint-Mihiel the main road, railway and canal by which Verdun was supplied; near Commercy, it brought the main line under the fire of German guns, and, near Aubreville, the railway running from Châlons to Verdun. Due to this situation, Verdun was no longer supplied except by a single railway—the "Petit Meusin," a narrow gauge line running from Bar-le-Duc. The danger presented by such conditions appeared in all its force when the Battle of Verdun started in February, 1916. Nevertheless, by way of marking the difficult position from which the First and Third Armies—in spite of their inadequate resources—had just extricated themselves, I announced in General Orders No. 33 of October 1st my entire satisfaction with their conduct.

On the 26th I gave directions for G.H.Q. to be moved to Romilly, as the retreat of the Germans had left it too far from the front.

On the 28th I made a visit to Franchet d'Esperey, and to reach his headquarters I had to pass over the field of battle of our Ninth Army. It was a desolate spectacle. Nearly all the villages had been destroyed by the bombardment or by the fires which the Germans had lit at the moment of their retreat. The road from Fère-Champenoise to Châlons was bordered on each side by an immense cemetery. In the woods which adjoined the railway line, near the tiny station of Normée, as far as the eye could reach were scattered huge graves all white with quick-lime. Caps, tunics and side-arms were hung upon hundreds of little crosses, at the foot of which bunches of wild flowers had been placed by pious hands.

Between Epernay and Rheims the roads were torn up, the milestones and telegraph poles knocked down; carts and vehicles of every kind, even cabs—come from no-one knows where—lay upside down, while the remains of motor-cars made up formless piles of broken iron; the

vineyards alone, by some strange circumstance, seemed not to have suffered. I visited a few batteries before reaching Rheims. The town itself was almost wholly intact, but the Cathedral, which, in violation of all recognized law, the enemy had savagely bombarded on September 19th, had been set on fire and had already suffered irreparable damage.

The war had been going on scarcely two months, and already one could measure with what ruin and devastation we would have to pay for our victory over Germany.

I have already stated that on September 15th the resistance felt in front of the Fifth Army became marked. It was in vain that on the 18th General Maunoury withdrew the IV Corps from his front and sent it to the left of the XIII Corps, which was operating on the right bank of the Oise. The failure of the manœuvre, due to its lack of amplitude, was now confirmed, and our forces on the left, following the example of our other armies, started a series of sterile frontal attacks, concerning whose success—due to our lack of ammunition—I had no illusions whatever. As mentioned elsewhere, this condition of affairs led me to create a new army to the west of the Oise. Special Order No. 31 of September 18th designated this force as the Second Army. I selected General de Castelnau to command it. My choice was based upon the following considerations:

First of all, General de Castelnau enjoyed throughout the army a high and fully merited reputation; he was endowed with keen intelligence, and his military culture covered the widest range; he had acquitted himself with honour in the difficult circumstances in which he found himself during the month of August and the early days of September. At the moment when certain incidents occurred around Nancy, his energy and self-possession, it is true, were not commensurate with his intelligence; but I felt justified in thinking that in the mission I was about to confide to him, requiring activity and a highly developed sense for tactics, he would bring into full play those capacities in the domain of manœuvre which I knew he possessed.

Moreover, little by little, events had led me to gravitate the Second Army towards the Woëvre and contract its front. Placed now opposite the south front of Metz, it could only fulfil there a defensive rôle. It was, therefore, this army which I could with the least difficulty withdraw from my line of battle. I assigned the greater part of its sector to General Dubail, commanding the First Army, and the rest to General Sarraill commanding the Third. And so, on September 20th, the day when the

Second Army made its appearance in Picardy, it ceased to exist in Lorraine.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning, the new Second Army comprised the following troops:

The two left corps of the Sixth Army (IV and XIII).

The XIV Corps, brought by rail to the region of Clermont and Beauvais.

The XX Corps, likewise moved by rail to the vicinity of Poix and Grandvillers.

General Conneau's Cavalry Corps (1st, 3rd, 5th and 10th Cavalry Divisions).

General de Castelnau's mission was defined in Special Instruction No. 32 of September 19th, as follows:

The Second Army will operate against the German right wing in such manner as to disengage the Sixth Army and permit it—and consequently the whole of our forces—to resume the forward movement.

This action will be effected by an enveloping movement against the enemy's right flank; but this movement must always be regulated so as to enable the Second Army to preserve, under all circumstances, a direction of march which will be out-flanking in relation to any new forces which the enemy may add to his front.

The detraining and assembling of the elements composing the Second Army were concealed and protected by a group of four territorial divisions<sup>6</sup> placed under the orders of General Brugère. To fulfil its task, this group was to move by short marches to the neighbourhood of Beauvais, then towards Corbie; incidentally it was also expected to put an end to the requisitions and acts of rapine which the enemy had been practising in our northern regions.

The entry into action of the Second Army had become most urgent. On September 20th, the situation of the Sixth Army, now vigorously attacked on the Aisne, caused me to send an order to General de Castelnau to "guard the bridges across the Oise around Compiègne and those over the Aisne up to Rethondes . . . and make your action felt as quickly and as energetically as possible." De Castelnau informed me of his intention to send, the next day, the XIII Corps to Noyon and the XIV to Lassigny and Guiscard. But the situation of the Sixth Army

<sup>5</sup> Special Instruction No. 30 suppressed the old Second Army; its headquarters, the elements pertaining to an army and the XX Corps were transported to the west of the Oise: the units remaining in the east were attached in part to the First Army, in part to the Third.

<sup>6</sup> The 81st, 82nd, 84th and 88th Divisions.



having improved by evening, I directed the commander of the Second Army to extend his movement towards the left.

On the 21st the XIII Corps took Ribécourt, but failed in front of Lassigny; the IV Corps reached Fresnières and Le Plessier (north-west of Lassigny) without meeting resistance, while Bridoux's Cavalry Corps raided around Péronne.

The German wireless stations were one of our most precious sources of information, and that day their activity gave us the hint that the enemy High Command was devoting particular attention to the German right wing. Various indications led us to deduce that a Seventh Army, commanded by General von Heeringen, was in process of formation for the purpose of operating on von Kluck's right.<sup>7</sup> And, as if to confirm me in the impression that the enemy's effort was being transferred elsewhere, a complete calm reigned in front of the Sixth Army that day, which was in vivid contrast with the activity of the preceding days.

During the days which followed, the Second Army continued its movement towards the north-east and the north, pivoting around the XIII Corps, which held the front Ribécourt-Fresnières. But on the morning of the 24th, General de Castelnau reported to me that all of his corps were already in contact with the enemy: the IV in the region of Roye, the XIV in that of Lihons-Foucaucourt, while the XX was arriving at Corbie. The next day the situation became clear: a violent engagement was now going on between the Oise and the Somme. Moreover, the German forces which blocked de Castelnau's advance already extended north of the Somme, along the line Feuillères-Bapaume-Marquion, in contact with our Cavalry Corps, whose action produced no appreciable slowing up in the march of the enemy columns.<sup>8</sup> As for

<sup>7</sup> I am unable to say whether this information was inexact or whether, being true, the Germans were led to modify their plans. There can be no doubt that the Seventh Army, which had been operating in Alsace, was withdrawn from the front; but it was thrown in between the German First and Second Armies to fill up the breach which had opened between them.

<sup>8</sup> General Bridoux, commanding the Cavalry Corps, was killed on September 17th. I had replaced him temporarily by General Buisson, commanding the 1st Division. On September 30th I was obliged to relieve this officer and replace him by General de Mitry. While it is true that our cavalry at this period seemed unable to produce generals of first-class ability, capable of managing a mass of three or four divisions, it is only fair to say that the division commanders did little to facilitate the task of their chief.

General de Castelnau reported to me on numerous occasions that the cavalry divisions passed whole days without sending him information, even without stating at what places they were to be found. These blunders were confirmed to me by Lieutenant-Colonel Brécard, my liaison officer with Maunoury's army. He was a cavalry officer and was deeply humiliated in having to report to me facts which his honesty obliged him to bring to my notice.



the territorial divisions which, on the 24th, I had ordered to move towards Arras and Bapaume in order to cover the left of the Second Army, they fell back on the night of the 26th/27th to the west bank of the Ancre between Aveluy and Miraumont where they entrenched themselves, one division being at Bucquoi.

The rapidity with which General de Castelnau's army became engaged along its whole front showed that the enemy was trying, by a movement symmetrical with our own, to seize and envelop our marching wing. It, therefore, became necessary to begin a new phase of the manœuvre by sending with all haste fresh forces to our extreme left. Unfortunately, we did not possess at that time the powerful mechanical transport service which reached its full development only during the last year of the war. Some of the troops were able to make the movement by march route, but for all the others the railways had to be called upon. Their task was a heavy one, for many of the lines were incapable of being used, and the convex form of our front obliged us to travel over the arc of a circle of which the Germans held the chord.

The following table will give an idea of the volume of traffic which the railway service had to provide during the last days of September and the first days of October:

	<i>Taken from</i>	<i>Date Entrained</i>	<i>Destination</i>
XI Corps	Ninth Army	September 25th	Amiens
X Corps	Fifth Army	September 28th	Amiens
77th Division	First Army	September 28th	Arras and Lens
70th Division	First Army	September 28th	Arras and Lens
8th Cavalry Div.	Sixth Army	(March route)	Montdidier
4th Cavalry Div.	Fifth Army	September 30th	•
XXI Corps	Ninth Army	October 1st	Lille
45th Division	Sixth Army	(transported in motor transport to Compiègne, whence sent by rail to the	North

Moreover, as the Germans seemed to have brought to face our left the major portion of the forces which they had kept in Belgium, I suggested to the Minister of War that "the moment had come for the Belgian Army to operate against the enemy's communications." I must confess that this co-operation of the Belgians in the battle we were now waging in Picardy, and which was so close to Flanders, appealed to me also as a good means of inducing our Allies to quit the dangerous isolation in which they found themselves under the walls of Antwerp. My suggestion, as will be seen further on, was not taken into consideration at this time, and it required the imminence of a catastrophe to decide the Belgian forces to align their forces with ours.

In any case, during the last days of September, the constant entrance into action of new units caused the battle to advance little by little to the north of the Somme. Our XI Corps, supported on its left by the XX Corps, soon came into collision on the plateau of Thiepval with enemy defences already solidly organized.

On October 1st the Germans, doubtless with a view to lessening the pressure that our left wing was bringing to bear, delivered a series of violent assaults between the Oise and the Somme. General de Castelnau became greatly disquieted by these attacks and as his reserves were naturally established near his left, he asked me for the support of those belonging to the Sixth Army. This request seemed to me justified, since the enemy had weakened his forces in front of Maunoury. Therefore, I directed the latter to "move all available reserves and all that can be constituted, to the west bank of the Oise, in support of the Second Army." In execution of this order,<sup>9</sup> the 56th and 62nd Reserve Divisions were moved to Compiègne on October 2nd. Here they came under the orders of General de Castelnau who used them to strengthen his defensive front between the Oise and the Somme.

But the extent of the line on which the Second Army was now fighting, the additions made to the forces engaged north of the Oise, the great difference in the rôle which fell to these troops according to whether they were in line on the north or on the south of the Somme, all now rendered the command of the Second Army extremely heavy and the more so since I foresaw that it would be necessary still further to reinforce my left wing and extend its action. These reasons led me, on September 29th, to place General de Maud'huy at General de Castelnau's disposal: he was to exercise, under the orders of the commander of the Second Army, the direction of the X Corps and the elements established on its left.<sup>10</sup> Then, on September 30th I constituted on the extreme left of my line a large body of cavalry consisting of Conneau's corps (1st, 3rd and 10th Divisions), and a corps under General de Mitry composed of the 5th Division, already in place, and the 4th and 6th Divisions arriving by rail.<sup>11</sup>

If it is taken into account that the Second Army had the 8th Cavalry Division under its orders and Maud'huy's detachment had the 7th, it

<sup>9</sup> This order was sent out at 5.15 p.m., October 1st.

<sup>10</sup> Maud'huy's army detachment was transformed into the Tenth Army on October 3, 1914.

<sup>11</sup> The 4th Cavalry Division was taken from the Fifth Army, the 6th from the Fourth Army, which had received it from the Ninth on September 17th.

will be seen that four-fifths of the French Cavalry was now north of the Oise.

The mission of the cavalry was established as follows:<sup>12</sup>

Conneau's corps, operating south of the Scarpe under the direct orders of General de Maud'huy, was to aid in out-flanking the enemy's right wing.

De Mitry's Corps, under General de Castelnau, was to operate north of the Scarpe, prevent enemy reconnaissances from penetrating our out-post line, make raids upon the enemy's communications and seek to gain contact, on the one hand, with the troops forming the garrison of Dunkirk—which had been pushed towards Douai, Orchies and Mouchin—and, on the other, with the Allied troops operating on Belgian territory in the region of Lille.

These dispositions had scarcely been taken when on October 2nd, the situation in the north suddenly assumed a grave aspect. In Maud'huy's detachment, while the X Corps was attacking without success to the south of Arras, Barbot's division (the 77th) and Fayolle's (the 70th), both of which had just detrained, were violently attacked by German forces debouching from the region around Douai. Barbot lost Mouchy-le-Preux, Fayolle held on with difficulty southeast of Lens, while on his left, the Territorials belonging to the Dunkirk garrison abandoned Liétard and the 7th Cavalry Division fell back upon Lens.

Now, on October 3rd the XXI Corps was due to begin detraining in the immediate vicinity of Lille or to the westward, at "a sufficient distance from the left wing of Maud'huy's detachment to enable it under all circumstances to out-flank any German forces which might be engaged against the Second Army."

The previous day, a telegram, sent at 12.20 p.m. from the Second Army, informed me that the present situation in the region Lille-Douai would make it impossible for the XXI Corps to detrain as far forward as had been intended; the staff of the Second Army suggested the Béthune region for the operation. At 2.50 p.m. General Anthoine, chief of staff of the Second Army, returned to the charge in a message insisting that the detraining be effected at Béthune.

These reiterated appeals seemed to me very bad omens. In the first place, they showed that the commander of the Second Army regarded the possession of Lille, with all its important industrial resources, as compromised and perhaps its loss as imminent; above all they showed that apparently we were no longer directing the course of events, but,

<sup>12</sup> Special Instruction of October 1st.

on the contrary, it was the enemy who was taking the initiative and seemingly imposing his will upon us.

I telegraphed to General de Castelnau at 5.20 p.m. that "in the event of it being absolutely impossible to detrain it at Lille, the XXI Corps would be halted on the line between Armentières and Hazebrouck . . . this result would be extremely unfortunate. Do not renounce Lille except as a last extremity." I also immediately sent Major Fétizon, my liaison officer with the Second Army, with an order embodying this decision.

On his arrival at Breteuil, headquarters of the Second Army, he was at once received by General de Castelnau and his chief of staff, who explained to him the risks which, in their view, were presented by detraining the XXI Corps at Lille. The commander of the Second Army then gave my liaison officer an exact idea of the situation, adding that, not only was it impossible for him to think of detraining the corps at Lille, but he even envisaged the withdrawal of his left wing behind the Somme, below Amiens, since the violence of the enemy's attacks threatened him with envelopment.

Fétizon tried in vain to combat this way of looking at the question, which was so contrary to my intentions. Realizing at once that he would not succeed in changing General de Castelnau's opinion and fully appreciating the grave consequences which such a decision would entail, he returned during the night to G.H.Q., and at 6.30 the next morning, October 3rd, he reported to me the result of his mission. He added that, at the moment he was getting into his car, about 1 a.m., Major Jacquand, chief of the Operations Bureau of the Second Army, assured him that in his opinion the situation was not as grave as it had just been represented, and that the retirement behind the Somme should and could be avoided.

It is needless to say that the news which Major Fétizon brought caused me the liveliest displeasure. The decision envisaged by General de Castelnau meant the sacrifice of our rich northern regions, and especially their coal fields, the loss of the coast up to the mouth of the Somme, and the inevitable destruction of the whole Belgian Army. Without a moment's hesitation I decided to go to Breteuil, where I arrived about 12.30 p.m.

I at once endeavoured to prove to de Castelnau and his chief of staff that the situation was not so bad as they thought it, and I succeeded in making them see the absolute necessity of holding fast at any price, rejecting all thought of the smallest retirement which would compromise

the success of the manœuvre I had been pursuing without pause for over three weeks.

De Castelnau complained of the shortcomings of certain general officers, but he excused them by reason of the gravity of the situation in which they had been placed. I replied to him by saying that this was no time for showing pity, that the interests of the country outweighed every other consideration, and that he must ruthlessly deprive of their command all who were not capable of exercising it. After declaring once more that I would not tolerate any further talk of retiring, I returned with all speed to G.H.Q., where I arrived at 7 p.m., and where other troubles awaited me.

These first days of October, 1914, still remain a disagreeable memory to me. The manœuvre I was pursuing was meeting with difficulties to which I could not close my eyes. The enemy, as I have said, could make his movements along the chord of the arc on which we had to operate, and in spite of the devoted efforts of our railway service, we could not succeed in sufficiently out-flanking the German right, which continued to move northward parallel to my extreme left. The attack on Saint-Mihiel had just been beaten off, and I was impelled to ask myself whether, on this immense and still fragile front, a new offensive would not compromise its security by suddenly breaking out at some sensitive point. Moreover, the fate of the Belgian Army at Antwerp caused me deep anxiety.

Finally, a request from Sir John French had arrived asking to move his forces from the Aisne front and to place them once more on the left of the French Armies. Thus a fresh problem was added to all the others. (I will return presently to the operations of the Belgian and British Armies.)

For the moment, and without allowing myself to be deterred by these increasing difficulties, the most important matter was to give a new impetus to my left wing. It is true that the capacity of our railway system, and the necessity of withdrawing forces only with great circumspection from the rest of the front restricted the number of troops we could send north, but I could at least bring my immediate action to bear on the local command, which I had just seen was faltering. It was here that I decided to call upon Foch.

Already, at the end of September, I had thought of taking him as my assistant, and to that effect I had sent the Minister of War a telegram couched as follows:

General Gallieni stands at present designated as my successor in case of emergency. However, amongst all the army commanders, General Foch has shown an incontestable superiority from the point of view of character and military ability. I request that a *lettre de service* be sent him designating him to replace me in case of need. Should the Government accept this suggestion, I will bring General Foch to my headquarters as "ad latus," to relieve me of a part of my daily growing task, and I will appoint another officer to succeed him in command of the Ninth Army.

J. JOFFRE.

The Minister agreed to my request, although he preferred not to give General Foch a *lettre de service* duly assigning him to the functions I had in view for him. Then, on the 4th of October, I decided to send Foch to the North as "Assistant to the Commander-in-Chief" charged with the mission of co-ordinating the action of de Castelnau's and de Maud'huy's armies and the group of territorial divisions commanded by General Brugère. Foch started off immediately. His army was broken up on October 5th and its units distributed between the Fourth and Fifth Armies.

All during the day of October 4th, the news from the Second Army continued to arrive, worse and worse. Towards 4 p.m., General Anthoine telephoned giving it to be understood that the situation was very bad and that General de Castelnau was preparing to take "grave decisions" that evening.

I immediately had a reply telephoned saying, "a cipher telegram has been sent you. Before receiving it, take no decision of the nature indicated by General Anthoine in his telephonic communication of 4 p.m."

The telegram, sent at 5.35 p.m., read: "I cannot admit a retirement which would give the impression of a retreat and which would deprive us of all possibility of executing a manœuvre later on."

But a little while afterwards, a new message from General de Castelnau arrived by telephone, saying:

General de Maud'huy tells me that his mission was to envelop, but it is rather he who is being enveloped. He states that his situation, in spite of the ground lost, is good along his front, but he is being pressed on both his wings, especially the left one. He considers that he can still hold on tomorrow, but he fears that his situation will be less favourable, and he does not know what is in store for him the day after tomorrow.

He asks me:

1. Whether he shall stand fast tomorrow.
2. What direction he must take in case of an eventual retirement—Saint-Pol or Doullens?



Saint-Pol appears to him more difficult, since his left wing is the one most menaced, and this direction would separate him from the main force without ensuring his union with the XXI Corps.

As far as he is concerned, General de Castelnau continues to think that Doullens is preferable and in the interests of all concerned; the situation today being what General de Castelnau, the day before yesterday, feared would arise, as explained to Captain Fétizon.

According to the telegram which has just reached Second Army H.Q., General de Maud'huy is no longer under the orders of General de Castelnau<sup>13</sup> and the former has the right to make his own decisions without any intervention; but before conferring upon him his liberty of action, which at the same time relieves General de Castelnau from his responsibility, the latter considers it his duty as a man of honour to transmit to G.H.Q. this exposé of the situation.

In reply, I sent a cipher telegram saying:

General Foch, designated as assistant to Commander-in-Chief, is delegated to co-ordinate the action of the Second Army, de Maud'huy's army and Brugère's group of territorial divisions. General Foch will arrive at Second Army H.Q. tomorrow morning October 5th.

I also directed Colonel Pont to telephone this message:

Lieutenant-Colonel Pont informs General de Castelnau that a telegram follows the one he has just received. It announces the arrival of a general officer who has authority to give all necessary instructions to General de Maud'huy. Meanwhile, until this general officer arrives, General de Castelnau will instruct General de Maud'huy to continue to hold fast tomorrow.

On the 5th the situation seemed to be stationary. But on the 6th it again became worse. Our troops which were fighting between the Oise and the plateaux east of Arras maintained their positions, on the whole, though with difficulty; in the region of Roye they lost a whole series of villages; farther north certain points of support were evacuated, under pretext that they were too far forward, or that the positions farther in rear appeared to be better located.

At 5 p.m., General Anthoine telephoned the following:

The IV Corps is yielding more and more and we are worried. Everything has been put in. The Second Army appeals to G.H.Q. We have the impression that the line is going to crack somewhere.

Part of the 53rd Division arrives this evening only, but the men are in a wretched state, having got drunk at Compiègne.

Impossible up to the present to get this communication to General Foch.

<sup>13</sup> It has been noted above that General Maud'huy's detachment had been converted into the Tenth Army.

This message did not over-disturb me. By this time my opinion was formed regarding the state of mind of the commander of the Second Army. Moreover, the information sent in by de Maud'huy's army showed that south and east of Arras the enemy had not succeeded in reaching our positions; farther north the two divisions of the XXI Corps were respectively at Neuville-Saint-Vast and at Lens, joined up by five cavalry divisions and they had advanced slightly. Therefore, at 6.20 p.m. I replied to General Anthoine's communication by the following cipher telegram:

Situation in north improving more and more; you must unhesitatingly hold on at any cost. Entrench yourselves as quickly as possible along your whole front. Act with utmost energy. Studying means of sending you reinforcements.

To Foch, I telegraphed twenty minutes later:

The Second Army has just sent me the following message (I here quoted the communication from General Anthoine). I feel that it is absolutely essential for you to stiffen the morale of this army, for it has evidently weakened.

Again, at 9 in the morning, to the Second Army:

Ask General Gough, in the name of the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, to support you temporarily. Field Marshal French has been informed of this request.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time I am asking the G. O. C. the Sixth Army to give you, if possible, the support of a brigade. Arrange with him direct as to moving this brigade.

On the morning of October 7th, Sir John French gave orders to Gough's and Allenby's cavalry divisions to lend their support to the Second Army until such time as French reserves could arrive. The Sixth Army, on its side, placed the 138th Brigade at General de Castelnau's disposal and it was moved by motor transport to Compiègne.

The 53rd Reserve Division, coming from the Fifth Army, had been sent to the same place on October 4th. (This is the division to which General Anthoine referred in pessimistic terms in one of his messages quoted above.)

The 58th Reserve Division, taken from the First Army, also detrained in the region of Montdidier on the 8th and was at once attached to the Second Army.

<sup>14</sup> It will be seen further on that the British cavalry division, commanded by General Gough, was at this moment moving by road in rear of the Second Army's front.

All these reinforcements succeeded in consolidating the front which from now on was to remain sensibly the same between the Oise and the Somme.

This, however, did not prevent the Second Army from telephoning at 7 o'clock on the morning of October 7th:

Nothing new during the night. Foucaucourt was evacuated as being too far forward. . . . No change in the North.

This message led me to have General Foch telephoned at 9.35 a.m.:

The Second Army has reported by telephone that Foucaucourt was evacuated as being too far forward. Please call the attention of the G. O. C. the Second Army to the inadvisability of these rectifications from front to rear, which may give the enemy the impression of having had a success, as well as be a source of demoralization to our own troops. This is the third rectification of this sort which the Second Army has effected. I hope it is the last. When a rectification is desirable it is by an attack forward that it should be made.

During all this crisis, whose perils I fully realized and whose details I have related only as they appear in official documents, General de Castelnau showed once more that his tenacity and will-power were not on a par with the high intelligence which I so gladly accorded him. Unfortunately, his chief, General Anthoine, who during the difficult moments at the Grand Couronné had preserved his coolness and clearness of vision, no longer showed these indispensable qualities at Breteuil. The reports he sent to me sufficiently prove this fact.

I decided to change him. To take his place, I fixed upon Colonel Duchêne, chief of staff of the XX Corps, in whose energy and determination I had great confidence. I ought to add that de Castelnau, who at first only reluctantly agreed to the change, was soon very glad that it had been made. The day after it was effected, Major Fétizon went to Dury,<sup>15</sup> to which place the headquarters of the Second Army had been transferred; during his visit, de Castelnau confided to him that "this is the first night in a long time that I have slept peacefully."

Moreover, as soon as he arrived, Foch fortified my action. He and de Castelnau had several rather stormy interviews; in fact, the characters of the two men were wholly dissimilar. At the beginning of the war, Foch had been de Castelnau's subordinate, and during the operations of the month of August, quite violent disagreements had arisen between

<sup>15</sup> Near Amiens.

them. The mission I confided to Foch during the early days of October—and which he fulfilled to my entire satisfaction—could not fail to intensify these divergences.

THE RELIEF OF THE BRITISH ARMY  
AND ITS TRANSPORT TO THE NORTH

If I attached such great importance to ensuring the inviolability of my front between the Oise and Arras, it was because new tasks imperatively claimed my attention. I refer to the problem Sir John French created when he manifested his desire to have his army moved to the north, and to the situation presented by the Belgian Army—which every day incurred greater and greater risk of being captured in Antwerp or of finding itself forced across the Dutch border.

Towards the end of September, Field Marshal French told me he wished to have his forces relieved from the Aisne front and transported to the left wing of the French Armies. On the 29th, he developed his views in the following note which he forwarded to me:

Ever since our position in the French line was altered by the advance of General Maunoury's 6th Army to the River Ourcq, I have been anxious to regain my original position on the left flank of the French Armies. On several occasions I have thought of suggesting this move, but the strategical and tactical situation from day to day has made the proposal inopportune. Now, however, that the position of affairs has become clearly defined, and that the immediate future can be forecast with some confidence, I wish to press the proposal with all the power and insistence at my command. The present moment appears to me to be singularly opportune for the execution of such a move.

In the first place, the position of my force on the right bank of the River Aisne has now been thoroughly well entrenched.

In the second place, I have carefully reconnoitred an alternative position on the left bank of the River Aisne, and have had this position entrenched from end to end, and it is now ready for occupation.

The strategical advantages of the proposed move are of even greater importance.

I am expecting to be reinforced by the 7th Division from England early next week.

Following closely on this reinforcement will come the 3rd Cavalry Division from home and then the 8th Division from home, and simultaneously with this last reinforcement will come two Indian divisions and an Indian cavalry division.

In other words my present force of six divisions and two cavalry divisions

will, within three or four weeks from now, be increased by four divisions and two cavalry divisions, making a total British force of ten divisions (five corps) and four cavalry divisions.

All through the present campaign I have been much restricted both in initiative and in movement by the smallness of my army in face of the enormous numbers of the enemy.

With an army of five corps and four cavalry divisions my freedom of action, field of operation and power of initiative will be increased out of all proportion to the numerical increase in corps, more especially as almost half my total force will then consist of fresh troops and will be opposed by an enemy already much worn by the severity of the previous fighting.

Another reason of a strategical nature for changing my position in the line is the great advantage which my forces will gain by a shortened line of communication, an advantage of which your railways also will reap the benefit.

It appears to me, therefore, that both from strategical and tactical reasons it is desirable that the British Army should regain its position on the left of the line.

There remains the question of *when* this move should take place.

I submit that *now* is the time.

At the present moment we are, in effect, stationary, and movements and changes can be easily made. Once the forward movement has commenced, however, it will be much more difficult to withdraw my army from the general line; the more the transfer of my force from its present position is delayed, the greater will be the confusion both at the front and on the Lines of Communication, resulting in an ever-increasing loss of power and efficiency in the coming campaign.

It is for these reasons that I urge the transfer of my force from its present position to the extreme left of the line, and request that the change should be made now.

J. FRENCH.

The Field Marshal's opinion as set forth in the note quoted, and his point of view, were irrefutable. For my part, I was ready to admit they were well-founded. Where we differed was as to the suitability of making the change immediately, for it would cause great confusion in the execution of the manœuvres of the left wing. When Sir John French said we were "stationary," this was true as regarded the British Army and the French Armies on either side of it, but he did not seem to have a proper appreciation of the importance of the actions taking place on the wings.

On September 30th I sent the British Commander-in-Chief a letter in which I set forth my point of view in detail, and the solution I recommended:

G. H. Q., September 30, 1914.

3rd Bureau  
No. 8095

## NOTE

From General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief,  
To Field Marshal French, Commanding the British Army

Sir John French has been kind enough to draw the attention of the Commander-in-Chief to his keen desire to have the British Army re-occupy the position which it originally held on the left of the French armies.

In view of the ever-increasing strength of the British forces, this position would offer great advantages in lightening the work of the French railways and diminishing the length of the British line of communication, and above all, in giving to Marshal French's Army a liberty and power of action very superior to that which it now possesses.

The increase of strength which will shortly accrue to the British Army by the arrival of the 7th and 8th Divisions, a division of cavalry, the two infantry divisions and one cavalry division from India, entirely justifies the Marshal's request. The Commander-in-Chief shares this view, and is persuaded that if this movement had been possible it would have been very advantageous for the Allied Armies, but so far the general situation has not made it possible for this to be carried out. Is it at present possible to contemplate its early realization?

His Excellency, Marshal French, considers that the present moment is a particularly favourable one for his project. In front of the British line, as also in front of the Sixth, Ninth and Fourth Armies, the situation is, so to speak, unchanged; for almost fifteen days, the armies of the centre have been holding their ground without making any material progress. But the Commander-in-Chief feels that he should point out that this is far from being the case on the wings.

As a matter of fact, on the right, the Third Army and a portion of the First Army have been waging a stubborn fight for several days in the neighbourhood of Saint-Mihiel, the outcome of which is not in doubt, but the results of which have not yet made themselves felt. On the left, the Second Army, which today forms the extreme flank of the line, has for the past three days been the object of furious attacks, which show how important the enemy considers it to crush our wing. But will this army continue indefinitely to form the left of the French forces? I cannot think so, for this very day that army has been subdivided, which will undoubtedly lead the Commander-in-Chief to form a new army there. The transport of troops necessitated by the creation of this army, formed from elements taken from the front though without leaving a gap in our line, will necessarily render our situation somewhat delicate for a few days. While the Commander-in-Chief has considered the possibility of withdrawing a certain number of corps without modifying his front, certainly he has never contemplated transporting an entire army, the removal of which would make a gap impossible to fill.

Since September 13th we have been fighting, and it is important that



during this crisis, which will have considerable influence on subsequent operations, we should each hold on to our positions without thinking of making any change, so as to be ready for any eventuality.

Now, the movement contemplated by His Excellency, Marshall French, would inevitably entail certain complications, not only in the position of the troops but also in those of supply trains, etc. It might possibly create confusion in the general dispositions of our armies, the extent of which it would be difficult to foresee.

For the above reasons the Commander-in-Chief cannot share the view of Marshal French as to the time when this movement can be carried out; on the other hand, it appears that it might be possible to begin it from today onwards by making certain dispositions, the detail of which is given below:

1. The British Army might operate like the French Army. It is today strongly entrenched in the positions which it occupies. While maintaining the integrity of its front, it might doubtless be possible for it to withdraw a certain number of divisions (at first, one corps), which might successively be transported to the left.

2. The British Cavalry Division is at present unemployed on the front; as was done for the II and X Corps and the 8th Cavalry Division it might be moved by march route to the extreme left, to act as liaison between the Belgian army and the French troops.

3. The 7th and 8th Divisions, which will shortly arrive, could be disembarked in the neighbourhood of Dunkirk; they would subsequently operate in the direction of Lille. Their action would immediately make itself felt on the right flank of the German army, which daily receives fresh reinforcements. These divisions would be joined to the divisions withdrawn from the front.

4. The Indian divisions, as soon as they are able to take the field, would move by rail to join the English formations assembled in the northern region and constituting the nucleus to which would be added the other British divisions as soon as it was possible to move them.

5. As soon as the advance can be resumed, the front will be narrowed: it would then be possible for the British Army to halt and then slip behind ~~the~~ move to the left of the line while the Sixth and Fifth Armies closed in towards each other: this movement would be all the easier to carry out because of the fewer units remaining to be moved.

To sum up, the Commander-in-Chief shares Marshal French's view that it is desirable for the whole British Army to be on the left of the French Armies, but cannot fully agree with him as to the time when this movement should be carried out.

The Commander-in-Chief would be grateful if His Excellency, Marshal French, would let him know whether he agrees with him as to the suggestions set forth above.

Sir John French immediately accepted this proposal. The British II Corps, which occupied the centre of the British front, was relieved on

October 1st by the extension of the two corps on each side of it; it was directed towards Compiègne, where, on October 5th, it was entrained for Abbeville-Etaples.

On October 3rd, Sir John, through the intermediary of General Wilson, informed me of his desire to see the whole British Army follow the movement of the II Corps. An agreement was reached enabling the following movement to be carried out:

The 69th Reserve Division (coming from the Fifth Army) arrived October 5th in the region of Soissons, and was employed by General Maunoury for relieving the left corps of the British (the III Corps).<sup>16</sup> This corps, whose relief was effected on the 6th and 7th of October, was moved into the zone Compiègne—Pont-Sainte-Maxence, where it began to entrain on the 9th.<sup>17</sup> Gough's and Allenby's cavalry divisions were to move by road. The I Corps was to be relieved later on—that is, as soon as I had a unit available which I could put in the sector it occupied.

However, I invited Sir John French's attention to the following point:

The manœuvre now being executed, I wrote him, requires the constant reinforcement of our left wing by withdrawals from various parts of the front; as the transport of the British Army has prevented, during nearly ten days, all transfers of French units, it is of capital importance for the outcome of our operations that all the movements of troops effected towards the north be made to collaborate *without exception and immediately* in the same task, viz., the arrest and outflanking of the German right wing.

I, therefore, asked the Field Marshal not to wait until all of his forces were reunited before employing the units which had already moved. He accepted these proposals in a letter dated October 5th. However, in spite of the agreement established between us, he asked that his last army corps be relieved during the night of October 6th/7th. It was impossible to grant this request, but Sir John, nevertheless, returned to the charge on the 9th and again on the 10th of October. I finally satisfied him by replacing the British I Corps by a brigade of the Sixth Army and some elements taken from the 32nd Division.

I am obliged to say that the precipitation with which the British Army got itself relieved from the Aisne front caused, as I had predicted when the question arose, the almost complete interruption during ten days of

<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact, the 69th Reserve Division at this moment constituted the sole reserve of the Sixth Army, which, as was seen above, had placed all its available troops at the disposal of General de Castelnau; therefore the British III Corps was relieved on its positions by Klein's provisional brigade, composed of the extra-divisional elements of the VII Corps a total of eight battalions.

<sup>17</sup> It detrained in the region of Saint-Omer.

the transport of the French troops towards the northern theatre of operations. The definite loss of the rich region centring in Lille was due, in my opinion, to this operation, my consent to which was accorded only with the greatest regret.

It had still another consequence. The three British corps were relieved on the Aisne by two French divisions, of which one was a reserve division, and a provisional brigade of eight battalions. On October 30th, after a violent artillery preparation, the left brigade (137th), holding the plateau of Rougemaison, was thrown back upon the left bank of the Aisne across the bridges at Vailly and Chavonne, and bodies of the enemy even succeeded in effecting a crossing. On November 2nd, likewise after an intense bombardment, the 138th Brigade, holding the right of the new sector, and which during the 30th had succeeded in holding on to its positions, was attacked and thrown back from the plateau of La Cour-Souprie into the valley of the Aisne.

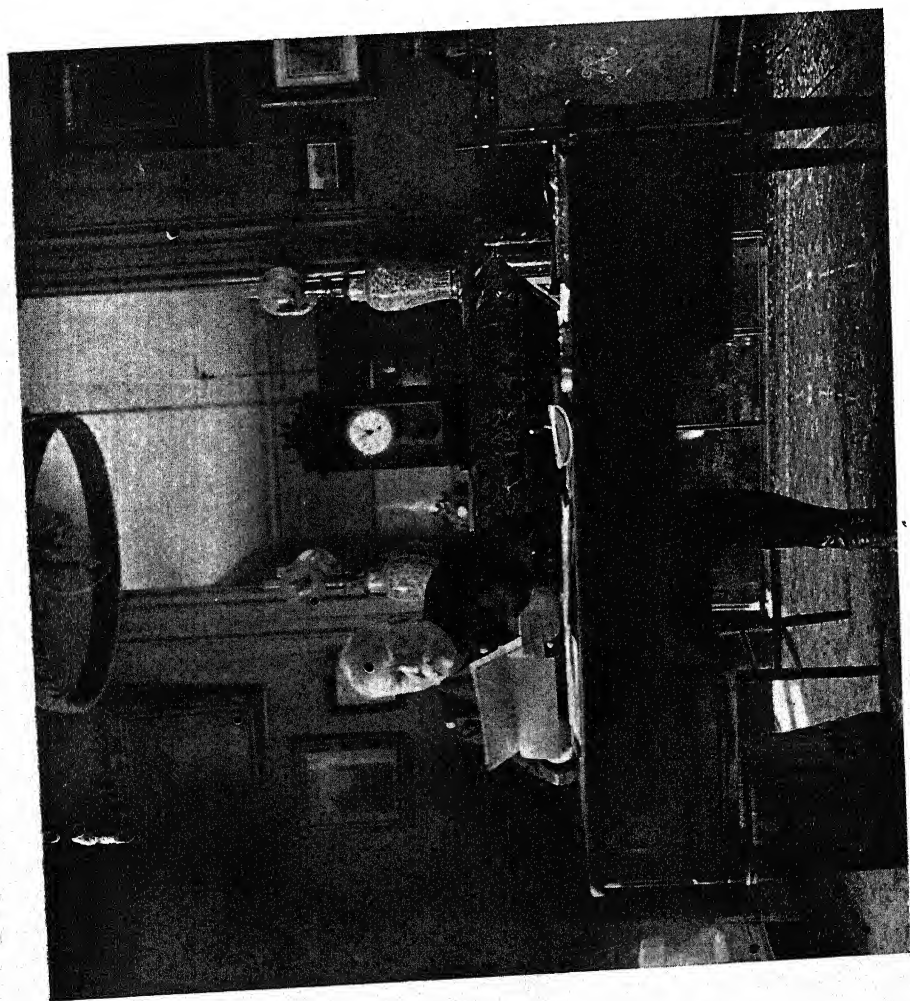
#### THE SIEGE OF ANTWERP AND THE RETREAT OF THE BELGIAN ARMY

The Germans had begun the siege of Antwerp on September 30th. By reason of the importance which the Belgian General Staff attached to this citadel of the Kingdom's defence (an importance increased tenfold now that the Cabinet Ministers and all the active forces of the country were assembled there), King Albert's Government "besought" the French Government to take into consideration the services rendered by Belgium to the Allied cause, and asked for aid and protection.

I had not waited for this moving appeal of our loyal Allies before doing for them all that lay in my power. On September 26th, General Brugère's group of territorial divisions, which were moving upon Bapaume, had established liaison through Conneau's Cavalry Corps, with elements of the Dunkirk garrison detachment, composed of six battalions, two batteries and one squadron, which were occupying Douai, Orchies and Tournai.

The Military Governor of Dunkirk was given orders to endeavour to establish contact on the upper Scheldt, even if it was only through simple patrols, with the Belgian cavalry, which, starting from Ghent, was moving up the valley of the Dender, in the direction of Valenciennes. On September 27th, the Dunkirk detachment established this contact.

It was at this moment, as I have related above, that I wrote to M. Millerand, Minister of War, pointing out to him the interest presented by "an energetic action on the part of the Belgian Army against the



G.Q.G. (GRAND QUARTIER GÉNÉRAL), CHANTILLY.



enemy's communications." To facilitate this operation, I directed the Governor of Dunkirk to "send in the direction of Ghent, light detachments transported in motor-cars or by railway . . . and to have it announced in Belgium that important Anglo-French forces were about to arrive in the region." With the same object in view, I reinforced the Dunkirk garrison by a brigade of marines, which entrained in Paris October 7th, by the 87th Territorial Division, transported by sea from Havre to Dunkirk October 6th, and by the 89th Territorial Division, railed October 8th from Versailles to Cherbourg, where it took ship.

But I had no intention of sending an army to the rescue of our Allies, as the Belgian Government and General Staff so urgently requested. I have already described how difficult was our own situation during the first days of October, with de Castelnau's army engaged along its whole front and its chief expecting at any moment to see his line break somewhere—de Maud'huy's army yielding ground here and there and its commander under the impression that instead of enveloping the enemy it was he who was being enveloped.

On October 1st and 2nd, I exchanged numerous telegrams with Bordeaux to explain my conception of the situation. In my opinion it was impossible to withdraw French troops from the general action now engaged in order to send them to the aid of an army shut up in Antwerp, 180 miles, in a direct line, from my left, while the despatch of a territorial division to Antwerp would have less material than moral effect. It seemed to me indispensable for the Belgian field army to quit the fortress, and for measures to be taken immediately to evacuate all transportable material, while rendering the rest useless. Anglo-French forces were being assembled in the north which could act in conjunction with the Belgians and secure their left flank if they should decide to retreat towards Bruges and Ostend. Once these dispositions accomplished, the Belgian Army would find itself established on the left flank of the Allied armies and in close contact with them.

For the same reasons I opposed with all my power the despatch to Antwerp of any of the British reinforcements arriving on the Continent. Without wishing to insinuate, as Sir John French thought was the case, that Lord Kitchener wished in this way to create the beginnings of a new British army which would be outside the authority of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, I considered it dangerous for Allied troops to go wandering off into a divergent theatre of operations, when their true place was in the battle in Flanders which each day was taking on a wider importance.



I drew special attention to this aspect of the matter in the following telegram to the Minister of War dated October 2, 1914, 5.40 p.m.:

Reply to cipher telegram No. 745. I confirm telegrams Nos. 203, 332 and 353 of October 1st and 2nd. General situation and manœuvre now being executed do not permit present withdrawal active division for sending Antwerp. As have already said, territorial division disembarked Ostend will be useful only for moral effect. Fortress of Antwerp can only be defended by garrison.

See grave objections in adding to this garrison the whole Belgian field army and a British division; on contrary, serious advantage unite all these troops outside the fortress. Territorial division from Havre and marine brigade Paris could be moved by sea to Calais or Dunkirk and from there by rail, the marines towards Antwerp, the territorial division toward Ostend.

I insist especially upon importance not transporting British 7th Division Antwerp. Have asked in agreement with Field Marshal French that 7th and 8th Divisions be sent Boulogne, whence transported towards north; likewise the British forces withdrawn from front.

Moreover, the manœuvre now being executed, involving assembling important forces in region Courtrai-Lille-Hazebrouck is best assistance we can bring Belgian Army. From this region we would make junction with it near Ghent.

See only advantage in sending General Pau on mission, passing through my headquarters.

On October 5th General Pau departed on a mission to the Belgian Government, bearer of instructions from me. In these, I said:

He is able to furnish the Belgian High Command with all indications required for assuring as complete a co-operation as possible between the Belgian and French Armies.

It is especially important that the Belgian forces after leaving Antwerp be given information which would enable them to continue their efforts south-east of the fortress and in conjunction with the Allied forces.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, my conception, based solely upon the military possibilities of the moment, was shared by neither the Belgians nor the British. The former were violently opposed to separating themselves from Antwerp, which General Brialmont had made the pivot of the country's defence. And yet history—our own especially—shows that the operations of any army tied to a fortress always end in catastrophe.

For the English, there was the traditional dogma which has ever refused to admit the possession of Antwerp by any great Continental power. But it is surprising, nevertheless, that the British Government, the War Office and the Admiralty could agree with such obstinate unanimity

<sup>18</sup> Orders of October 5th—Missions.

that, in view of the existing situation, it was possible to save Antwerp by sending to its assistance any such feeble forces as the Empire and ourselves then had at our disposal.

As early as September 7th, Mr. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, had addressed to his Prime Minister, to Sir Edward Grey and to Lord Kitchener, a memorandum in which he insisted upon the value of Antwerp, especially from a naval point of view:

The Admiralty, he said, view the sustained and effective defence of Antwerp as a matter of high consequence. Antwerp preserves the life of the Belgian nation; it safeguards a strategic point which, if captured, would be of the utmost importance.<sup>19</sup>

On October 2nd, Lord Kitchener telegraphed to Sir John French:

The German attempt to besiege Antwerp has created a very serious situation. There is a danger of Antwerp falling before very long.

We are informing the French Government that, if Joffre cannot launch a decisive action in France within three or four days, we cannot hope that Antwerp will hold out, unless he is able to send some regular troops there to co-operate with all those we can despatch, that is to say, the 7th Division and a cavalry division.

If you leave your present positions, would it be possible to suggest to Joffre that, if he can send some troops, you would rejoin the 7th Division and all the other troops which we are able to send from here, with such part of the force now under your orders in France as might be judged necessary for saving Antwerp? In the meantime, the remainder would continue the move to the new positions.

It is certainly not an exaggeration to consider that this telegram tended to intensify the desire manifested by Sir John French to obtain my consent to the transfer of his army from its position on the Aisne, as I have described on a previous page.

The same day, Sir Edward Grey set forth a similar thesis, using almost identical terms, in a telegram addressed to the British Ambassador at Bordeaux:

Unless the main situation in France should take a favourable turn within a short while, and enable us to come to the aid of Antwerp by despatching a suitable force, it is extremely desirable that General Joffre should make an effort and send some regular troops to Dunkirk, where they would be able to co-operate with our reinforcements, to protect Antwerp.

We can send some first-line troops, but they are not of themselves sufficient to raise the siege of Antwerp, and we can only send them if they co-operate with French regular forces.

<sup>19</sup> *The World Crisis.*

If General Joffre can carry out in France, within two or three days, a favourable and decisive action, the result might be the delivery of Antwerp. If not, and unless he now sends some regular troops, the fall of Antwerp must be contemplated.

To send an important body of troops to the relief of Antwerp, as would have been necessary in order to obtain decisive results, was not in my power, by reason of the number of the enemy forces at that very moment attacking us and the difficult manœuvre I was seeking to effect. As for sending "a few regular troops," as the War Office and the Foreign Office suggested, this seemed to me not only useless but dangerous, for it would have offered a temptation to the Belgians to prolong a situation which I was doing all in my power to alter.

Another point is to be noted. Colonel Dallas, whom Lord Kitchener had directed to go to Antwerp on September 29th, announced that the German Army besieging the place comprised the III Reserve Corps, a division of marines, an ersatz division, a landsturm brigade, two regiments of engineers and a regiment of siege artillery—about 90,000 men; this estimate the Belgian military authorities considered should be increased by a brigade of landwehr and some landsturm elements. Facing these the Belgian field army consisted of 80,000 men, to which were to be added the 70,000 troops comprising the garrison of the forts. If these figures can be considered accurate, they furnish one more proof of the fact that an army which shuts itself up within the perimeter of a fortified place no longer plays a rôle commensurate with its strength.

Be all this as it may, the English directed 8,000 marines upon Antwerp. Then, in order to get an estimate of the situation on the spot, they sent there the First Lord of the Admiralty. Mr. Churchill had hardly arrived when he offered to take command of the British forces operating in Antwerp; this proposition, however, was not accepted by the London Government. However, Mr. Churchill says in his book that by his personal action he delayed the fall of the fortress by five days. Possibly he likewise delayed the departure of the Belgian Army, whose retreat to the Yser was thereby rendered the more difficult.

In regard to the French brigade of marines, which for a moment there had been some thought of pushing as far as Antwerp, it was halted by General Pâu when he passed through Ghent.

General Rawlinson, who commanded the British forces that landed at Ostend and Zeebrugge (7th Division and 3rd Cavalry Division), established his headquarters at Bruges.

Antwerp fell October 9th. On the 11th, the Belgian Army, whose de-

parture had been delayed by hesitations and counter-orders, arrived in the zone Ostend-Nieuport-Dixmude-Thourout. Its retreat had been covered by General Rawlinson's troops and the French brigade of marines.

It thus came about that by the middle of October, 1914, there were assembled on the left wing of the Allied front on the West, the Belgian Army, bodies of French troops, and the entire British Expeditionary Force. This new situation which in itself presented incontestable advantages, required the presence of an authority which would direct these Allied armies towards a common end.

As regards the British High Command, while no change had taken place in the form of my relations with it, I have already said that the Victory of the Marne had created between Sir John French and myself an atmosphere of confidence which nothing could diminish. I will relate in another place the service it fell to me to render him and how much this incident increased his regard for me. Moreover, General Foch, who represented me in Flanders, by his energy, his infectious high spirits, his tact and his personal relations with General Wilson, the British assistant chief of staff, succeeded in establishing with our English Allies a contact which brought most happy results.

In regard to the Belgian Army, which King Albert commanded in person, my situation at first was rather delicate; but difficulties were all smoothed out, thanks to the self-denying magnanimity of the King. It was decided that the Belgian Army would remain on its own territory, commanded by His Majesty, who agreed to accept my general instructions on the same footing as the British Army.

While I had no intention of interfering with the independence of the Belgian Army, I felt that a vigorous impetus would have to be given to it, for the wretched condition in which it stood was fully reported to me. The retreat from Antwerp had been a harsh experience, which brought to the men a feeling that they had been abandoned by their country's allies. Although this was certainly far from being our intention, I felt that such an impression must be effaced without a moment's delay and the Belgian Army put in condition to co-operate in the manoeuvre against the German right wing. The increase in the number of Allied troops in Flanders was about to give a wider extension to this operation, but, on the other hand, its difficulties were daily augmenting with the arrival of fresh German units in the line.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> It is known that during the battle of Flanders the enemy not only brought troops from other parts of his front but employed units freshly organized. In addition there were those which the fall of Antwerp had made available.

On October 16th General Pau arrived to make a report on his mission. The Belgian Army appeared to him to be incapable of any effort for the moment. He did not hide the impression he had received that while the men gave proof of calmness, courage and endurance, the officers and non-commissioned officers were not up to the mark—as is always the case in armies which have lived through a long period of tranquillity. Belgium had been at peace ever since the birth of the nation, and in this rich and happy country almost no one imagined that war was possible until the events of August, 1914, broke upon them.

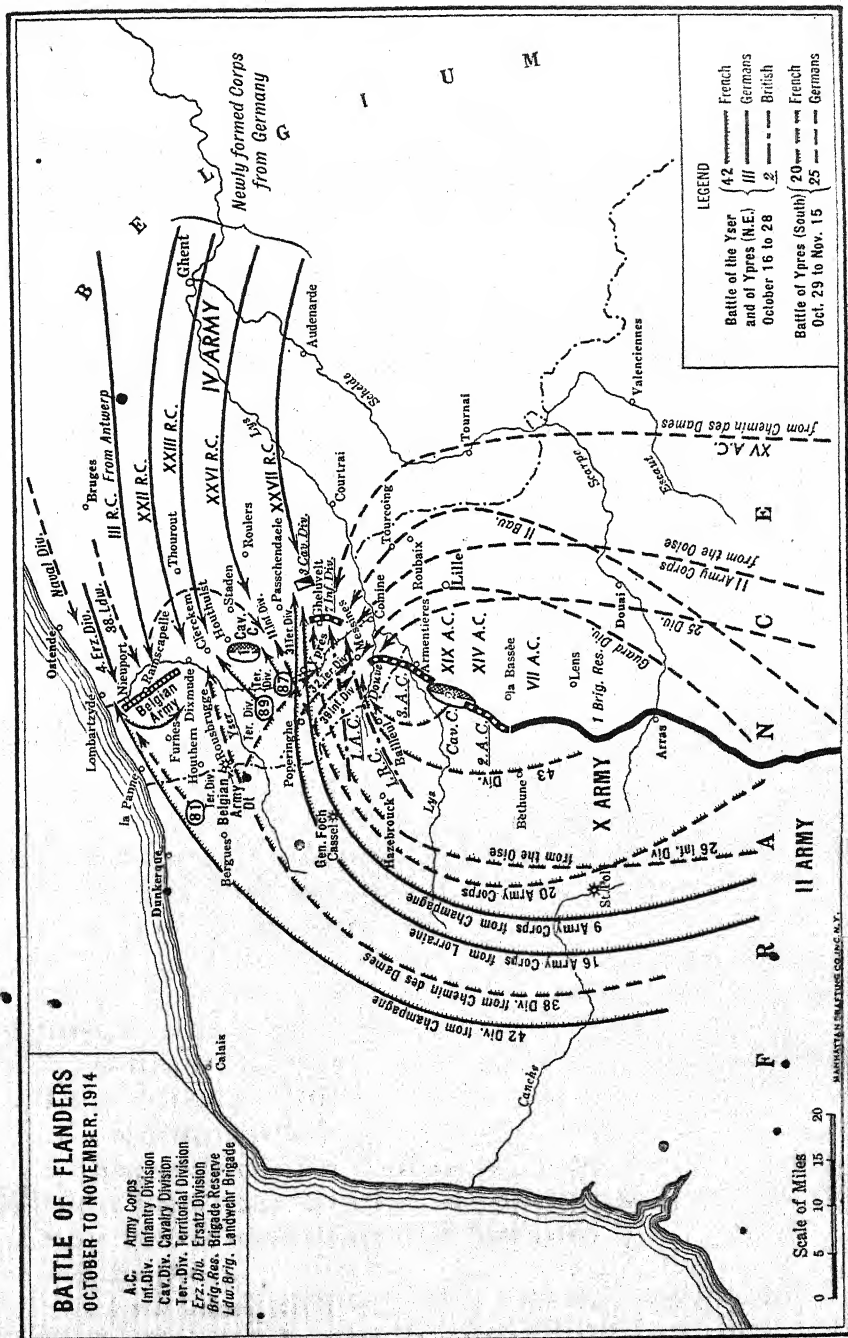
Even before General Pau returned, information from various sources had confirmed me in the impression that we ought to take steps without loss of time to aid our unfortunate Allies in surmounting this crisis. In order to establish a firm and lasting liaison with them I decided to place a mission with the Belgian General Staff, to the head of which I assigned Colonel Brécart.

He left immediately, and on the 17th he returned from Furnes to report on the events following his arrival and the results of his first contact with the Belgian High Command. His impressions corroborated those of General Pau, but it was not long before the Belgians gave signs of rapid recuperation.

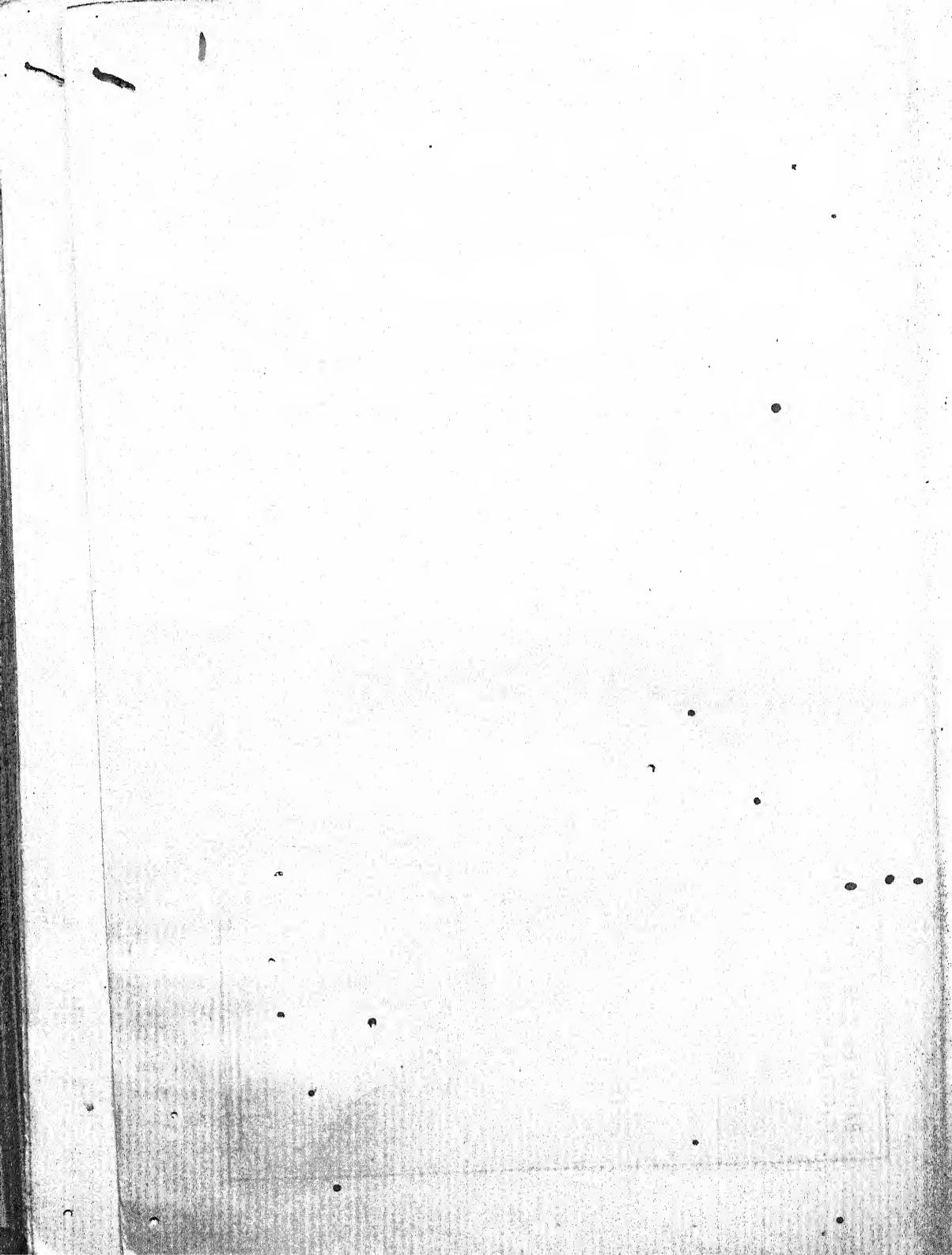
Then General Foch, on his side, proceeded to get in touch with the Belgian Army, and on October 16th the King received him, along with Colonel Brécart. Foch was deeply moved and saddened by the state in which he found our Ally's army. The King, with his family and his army, had been obliged to seek refuge on the sole scrap of Belgian territory which had escaped the enemy, and he bore upon his features the marks of the days of anguish he had just passed through and the anxieties which the future inevitably aroused. In the course of this interview, Foch endeavoured to convince the King that there still existed many causes for hope and that this thought must be invoked to unite and encourage us all during the terrible trials which inevitably still faced us.

While doing all I could to aid in putting the Belgian Army on its feet, I devoted serious attention to seeing that a solid support was provided for it. It seemed first of all indispensable to make sure of preserving at any cost the line of the Yser. To this end I decided to take the group of territorial divisions, all the cavalry, the garrison of Dunkirk, together with all the reinforcements that I would ultimately send up, and unite them into a detachment which I would place alongside the Belgian Army. I gave the command of this force to General d'Urbal.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> This group was first called the Army Detachment of Belgium (October 20th). It was afterwards (November 16th) transformed into the Eighth Army.







With the same object in view, I telegraphed to Lord Kitchener on the 16th:

Now that operations extend up to the coast of the North Sea from Ostend to the outer works of Antwerp, it seems important for the navies of both countries to share in the work by giving protection to our left wing and by bombarding the German right flank with long-range guns. The commander of the naval forces should come therefore, operate in close touch with General Foch, through the intermediary of the Governor of Dunkirk.

Mr. Winston Churchill, who cites this telegram in his book, *The World Crisis*, adds: "This task was immediately assured by us."

Then, as soon as it was possible, I decided to go in person to see the King and visit his army. The services rendered by the Belgians to the common cause and the severe ordeals through which they had just passed gave them a double title to our interest and affection.

On October 19th I made a short visit to General Sarraill at Verdun; in returning, I stopped at Châlons to see General de Langle, commanding the Fourth Army; the evening of the 20th, I left by rail for Amiens, and on arriving there the next morning I found General Foch waiting for me.

As usual, with him, he was in good spirits and full of life. We started off together for Caguy, H.Q. of the Second Army, where I had a short talk with General de Castelnau, whose positions were now stabilized. I then passed through Doullens, where Foch had his headquarters, as also General Brugère, commanding the group of territorial divisions. At Saint-Pol, where I next stopped, I saw General de Maud'huy. At his headquarters, I also met General d'Urbal, who had just taken command of the Northern Detachment, and General Conneau. After a brief visit to Sir John French at Saint-Omer, his G.H.Q., I passed by Dunkirk and finally reached Furnes at 4 o'clock.<sup>22</sup> Here I went to the Hôtel de Ville, where I was immediately received by His Majesty.

The King's countenance, though calm, bore an expression of indefinable sadness. I expressed to him my deep satisfaction at seeing his army removed from the dangerous isolation to which events had doomed it during the first months of the war, and I asserted my conviction that victory would crown our efforts and eventually recompense the enormous sacrifices which Belgium had been called upon to make for the common good.

As I was leaving the Town Hall after my visit, there occurred a stirring incident which deserves to be recorded.

<sup>22</sup> In entering Saint-Omer I passed some of the magnificent troops of the Indian Army Corps which were just arriving.

The glorious 42nd Division, commanded by that magnificent soldier, General Grossetti, had reached Dunkirk the day before and had pushed the 16th Battalion of Chasseurs on to Furnes. The arrival in the town, as night was about to fall, of this alert and perfectly disciplined body of troops had produced a most comforting feeling amongst the Belgians. As I came out of the Town Hall, Colonel Brécart informed me that the 16th Chasseurs were assembled for inspection near by. I immediately gave orders for them to pass in review before His Majesty. The march past of this splendid battalion, hardened by months of strenuous campaigning, was a magnificent sight, and I had the feeling that those chasseurs, divining my intention, were determined to give the King of the Belgians an evidence of that unconquerable determination which animated the whole of France.

Belgians are rarely demonstrative, but their enthusiasm now broke out in shouts of applause; and the King looked as though he had been suddenly warmed by the spectacle. As for me, the emotion I felt still stirs me as I look back upon that moment.

I took leave of His Majesty at 5 o'clock and left for Calais, where I dined with M. Sartiaux, chief engineer of the Northern Railway Company. In replying to the words he addressed to me at the close of the dinner, I rendered a well-merited homage to the magnificent work accomplished by the railways since the outbreak of hostilities. The personnel of the Northern Company, especially, was at that moment performing a mighty task. It is only just to refer here once more to the debt of gratitude that France owes to her railway companies for the magnificent work they performed during the numerous crises which arose during the war.

That evening I slept in my train, and the next morning, October 22nd, I found my motor-cars at Creil and returned to Romilly.

On October 12th a general offensive had been prepared for the following day.

The French Tenth Army was to advance by its left upon Lille.

The British Army was to move its right to the north of Lille and march on Tournai, while its left, supported by Rawlinson's corps, would follow the line Bailleul-Courtrai.

The Belgian Army, its right supported by the French Brigade of Marines, was to oppose any German forces which might come from Antwerp by way of Ghent.

The arrival in the line of fresh German troops (newly formed corps

and those released by the siege of Antwerp) did not give me great hope of obtaining decisive results from this offensive. However, if executed vigorously it might make it possible to inflict a serious check on the enemy's right wing, re-occupy Lille and prevent the Germans from extending any further their invasion of French and Belgian territory.

Unfortunately, it did not bring any such results. The principal causes were as follows:

The British III Corps which, on October 12th, had reached the front Eecke-Pradelles (north-east of Hazebrouck), was not engaged until the 20th, after the move of the I Corps and the Lahore Division had been completed. During these eight days the II Corps was the only one engaged in the la Bassée region.

The condition in which the Belgian Army had arrived made it impossible for that force to make the effort which the situation required.

Then, on the French side, the troops engaged in the north were composed of too diverse elements. There were excellent active corps and crack units, there were cavalry divisions, made up of good men with excellent officers, but whose efficiency when fighting on foot was considerably diminished, especially by reason of their armament,<sup>23</sup> and, finally, there were territorial divisions, as a rule very poorly officered.

On the other hand, beginning about the middle of October, the Germans started two heavy attacks in the northern region. The first was directed by the Prince of Württemberg, who, before that, had commanded an army in Champagne. Its object was to force the Yser and crush the Belgians. The second, more powerfully mounted, was led by the Crown Prince of Bavaria who, up to that time, had commanded the Sixth Army in Lorraine.

In fact, an immense battle had been precipitated in this low, flat, muddy region, which, with alternating fortunes, continued under a ceaseless rain, demanding of the men an extraordinary energy and unflagging persistence.

The struggle on the Yser reached its culminating point on October 26th. During the preceding days, the Belgian Army had weakened and on the 25th this became pronounced; the enemy was crossing the Yser in several places. Fortunately, the 42nd Division had been kept at Lombaertzyde. On the 26th, our Allies lost for the moment the line of the railway to which they had fallen back; but the 42nd Division, reinforced by two cavalry regiments and the marines, together with two bat-

<sup>23</sup> It should be especially remembered that our cavalry troops had no bayonet. Some of the dragoon regiments took their lances with them into the trenches.

talions of Senegalese, held tenaciously to its positions. Grossetti reported that he was holding his ground and that the evening would find him still on the railway line, no matter what happened. He kept his word.

The picture of Grossetti seated on a chair in the middle of a crossroads swept by a hail of bullets, and with perfect calm continuing to direct the fighting of his division, has passed into history. This man was the core of the resistance during the whole of that day.

Night fell without the enemy having realized any material advance. The Belgians were radiant. The catastrophe had been averted.

On the 27th, orders were given to flood the region lying between the Yser and the railway line. By the 28th, the inundation had made wide progress, and on the 29th the Germans found themselves forced to withdraw that portion of their forces which had managed to get across the railway. Thus relieved, the French troops were enabled to resume the offensive, and on October 30th Ramscappelle, lost by a Belgian detachment, was brilliantly recaptured by elements of the 42nd Division. Numerous prisoners were taken.

During November 1st and 2nd, the Germans were obliged to withdraw to the right bank of the river, abandoning many wounded and a large amount of material caught in the mud or surrounded by the rising waters. During the following days, their attacks gradually diminished in violence, and then, after a few convulsive efforts, they came to an end. The German offensive along the coast had entirely failed; the enemy succeeded neither in reaching Calais nor in crushing the Belgians, who remained permanent masters of this last strip of their soil.

During all this time, the battle of Ypres continued with unabated fury. On October 16th and the following days, the Allied offensive made some progress, although very slowly; but the entry into line of fresh German troops, composed of newly created formations, soon stopped our advance, and I was forced to find reinforcements to send to General Foch in order to enable him to face the new attacks. On the 20th, I placed at his disposal the 9th Cavalry Division and the 31st Division of the XVI Corps, which I had held in general reserve at Compiègne. Almost immediately afterwards, I started the brigade of Senegalese *Tirailleurs* towards the north. It was at this moment, as already related, that I created the "Army Detachment of Belgium," under the command of General d'Urbal. As at first constituted, this detachment comprised the 42nd Division, the Brigade of Marines, the 87th and 89th Territorial Divisions, de Mitry's Cavalry Corps (4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Cavalry Divisions), the IX Corps and the 9th Cavalry Division. During the days following, General Foch



also received sixteen regiments of corps cavalry, temporarily taken from our army corps on the right and centre.

On October 25th, in spite of all these powerful reinforcements sent to the north, I was obliged to acknowledge that our offensive had become a defensive. The increasing violence of the German attacks obliged Foch to throw his troops into the battle as they detrained, the Germans were excited to the highest pitch by the presence of the Emperor and by the thought that they were making "a decisive effort against the left wing of the French Army," and by proclamations which assured them that they were now "settling the fate of the great battle which had been started many weeks ago."<sup>24</sup>

During the following days, I continued to push new reinforcements towards the north. On October 27th, Foch received two groups of corps artillery from the VI Corps, immediately followed by the 38th Division and Headquarters of the XXXII Corps, which I had just created under the command of General Humbert.<sup>25</sup> The same day, I placed at Foch's disposal the 32nd Division and the extra-divisional elements of the XVI Corps. (This Corps was re-formed in the north.)<sup>26</sup> On the 28th, I gave orders to the Second Army to withdraw the XX Corps from the front and place it in general reserve, ready to be entrained at any moment. On the following days the situation seemed to grow worse. On the 31st the enemy redoubled his efforts in the region of Messines, which the English lost but which they retook immediately. On November 1st his attacks were renewed with increased violence. The British again lost Messines, but the next day the situation once more improved.

These costly and fruitless efforts which the enemy continued to make along our front showed that the battle had now reached a state of equilibrium. What I feared was that the German High Command, seeing the futility of these attacks, would make a sudden assault upon some other part of the front, in order to conceal and counterbalance the repulse just suffered. What confirmed me in this idea was the report that troops had been entrained at Ostend and Thourout, and that unusual activity had been observed along the front of our First, Fifth and Sixth Armies.

I, therefore, sent a letter to General Foch, on November 4th, in which I pointed out to him the importance of "reconstituting the army reserves, all of which had been sent to the north, in such fashion as to be able to

<sup>24</sup> Proclamation of the Crown Prince of Bavaria.

<sup>25</sup> The 42nd Division formed a part of this new army corps.

<sup>26</sup> As was stated above, the other division of this corps, the 31st, had already been sent to Flanders on October 20th.



break up, if possible, as soon as they take place, all attacks of the enemy, until such time as our supply of ammunition makes it possible for us to resume energetically the offensive in some carefully chosen region."

During the following days, General Foch's operations had for their principal object the consolidating of the situation around Ypres. However, on the 6th the German attacks redoubled in violence north and south of the town, and Foch was obliged to put in the 39th Division of the XX Corps, which I had placed at his disposal. On the same day, at 11.30 a.m., I sent him a telegram authorizing him to use the rest of the XX Corps, which I held in reserve at Aubigny; but I directed him "to employ these reserves only in case of absolute necessity and for the purpose of ensuring the inviolability of our front in the Ypres region. This must be provided for at any cost."

On November 10th, although the previous days had been marked by greater calm, I decided to send to the north important reinforcements, taken from the reserves of the various armies, which were left only the strict minimum necessary for the protection of their front. These forces amounted to a total of two brigades of infantry, ten battalions of chasseurs, and one complete division of infantry.<sup>27</sup> These troops were not intended for feeding the battle; they represented the *last reserves* that I could take from my armies. My object in sending them to the north was as follows:

1. To enable us to restore order in the various units whose elements had become mixed up by the very nature of the battle.
2. To enable the troops which had most urgent need of rest to be relieved, and, in doing this, to diminish the congestion on this part of the front and reconstitute reserves for the other armies.

As I had anticipated, the German attacks after November 12th became more and more rare and diminished in violence; then they stopped, and, for a while calm reigned along this front. The Germans had given up the idea of taking Calais.

While the last phase of the battle of Flanders was still in progress, I was obliged to proceed once more to the north, for on October 30th the President of the Republic indicated his desire to visit this region. Had it been possible I would willingly have deferred this trip, for to accompany the President would absorb all my time during several days, every hour

<sup>27</sup> Six battalions of chasseurs and one brigade of infantry, shortly followed by the rest of the 26th Division, coming from the Second Army; four battalions of chasseurs from the First and Third Armies; one Moroccan brigade from the Fifth Army; one active brigade of the 44th Division taken from the First Army.

of which was precious. However, under the circumstances, I felt unable to offer my objections.<sup>28</sup>

I started for Amiens at 7.15 a.m., Sunday, November 1st. Arriving at noon, I joined President Poincaré who invited me to luncheon; he had with him MM. Millerand and Ribot, the Prefect of the Somme, General Fraysse, and the Director of the *Sûreté Générale*. At one o'clock, we left for Dunkirk, where we met Lord Kitchener, M. de Brocqueville, General Foch and M. Cambon. We had a short conference with them, in the course of which M. Poincaré announced the intention of the Government to continue the struggle until victory had been obtained, no matter what it cost; but he urged Lord Kitchener to see that the promised reinforcements were not too long in coming from England.

During the dinner which followed, I remember that I had occasion to speak of the courage, good humour and patience of our soldiers. This last virtue was not generally considered one of the qualities which characterized our people; and yet during three long months of uninterrupted battle our men had never showed at any moment the smallest trace of moral depression and had amply proved that they were ready to answer any demands that were made upon them. M. de Brocqueville went further than I did. He declared, now that he had lived for some time in the midst of our soldiers, he was ready to believe that nothing was impossible for them to accomplish.

I quickly interrupted him by saying, "Quite true, but on condition that they feel themselves commanded by capable officers who have proved themselves worthy of their confidence." This led me to speak of the numerous changes I had been obliged to make in our general officers; many of which had cost me a cruel effort, although I had unhesitatingly carried them through; I added that it was my intention to continue this weeding-out process without hesitation.

The next day, November 2nd, the President and I left to pay our respects to the King and Queen of the Belgians. The King came out to meet us and we then proceeded to La Panne where the Royal family were installed, thus marking their determination not to quit the soil of

<sup>28</sup> A few days before this, I had sent King Albert a number of *Médailles Militaires* and crosses of the Legion of Honour. On October 28th the King replied in his own hand:  
My dear General,

I thank you very much for the decorations which you have been kind enough to place at my disposal for the purpose of being conferred upon those who most distinguished themselves during the defence of the Yser. Your kindly thought, so delicately expressed, gives me as much happiness as it confers honour upon my army.

Please believe me, my dear General, your devoted and affectionate

ALBERT

Belgium. In presenting myself to the Queen, I assured her most solemnly that sooner or later we would drive the Germans out of her country. I could see by the way Her Majesty listened to these hopeful words how greatly her courageous soul stood in need of comfort, and how much solace they brought her in the hours of unspeakable sadness through which she was now living.

We then went to Furnes where two squadrons of the 6th Hussars and two Belgian squadrons passed in review before the King and the President. At half-past nine, we took our leave, accompanied by the King to the frontier. We next reached Cassel where we lunched with General Foch. In the afternoon we visited General d'Urbal, whom the President made a Commander of the Legion of Honour; we then proceeded to Amiens. Here I left M. Poincaré and returned to my headquarters.

This Battle of Flanders was a severe trial for me and for the Army. Although we succeeded in holding up the enemy in his attempt to reach the sea, I must admit that I had hoped for more. I especially regretted that the front had become permanently established to the west of Lille, whose immense resources were thus left in the hands of the Germans during four years.

I cannot close this part of my memoirs without once more speaking of the soldiers who had to endure the hardships of this desperate campaign and the chief who commanded them. I have already mentioned under what difficult conditions I had sent General Foch as my representative in charge of the operation. He gave proof throughout of the highest military qualities, and showed himself, in addition, to be a most admirable diplomat. His tact, his good spirits, his far-sighted and infectious determination, exercised a most beneficent influence, particularly upon the British.

It seems an appropriate place to relate here the service which I had occasion to render Sir John French and upon which I would not lay so much emphasis except that it goes to prove how solid had become the bonds of affection and esteem which united the British Commander-in-Chief and myself.

For some time there had existed—and it was a secret for no-one—considerable friction between Lord Kitchener and Sir John French. At the beginning of November, Kitchener, as I have said above, made a visit to France. Among other matters which he proposed to decide was the question of placing General Sir Ian Hamilton at the head of the British Army instead of Sir John French. As soon as I got wind of the proposal which threatened French, I seized the occasion presented by an interview I had

with Kitchener at Dunkirk, and which I have related above, to make a most earnest effort to remove it, and I had the satisfaction of succeeding. A few days later, I received a letter from Foch, from which it may be interesting to cite a few passages.

Cassel, November 9, 1914.

My dear General,

I told General Wilson a few days ago that one of the reasons which brought Lord Kitchener to Dunkirk was his intention of replacing Sir John French by General Ian Hamilton, and I told Wilson that it was following your express request that the plan had been given up. I added that I had this on the best authority.

Wilson immediately told the Field Marshal, who, obtaining confirmation of the scheme from other indications, came to thank me for having given him the information. He intends to go to see you and express his gratitude. I suggested to him to wait a while until pressing events allowed us a little more liberty. I thought I would let you know.

I write you, *currente calamo*, a certain number of questions which have arisen in my mind. I expect to ask you to let me come to see you in a few days, when things are a little more settled here; in order that we may talk about them. For the moment, the length of the trip holds me back. There is much work to do here, but the future must be thought about, and that, perhaps, without delay.

We are doing everything possible to regroup our units and make a better disposition of our resources. The question of reserves constantly preoccupies me. I had to engage a regiment of the 11th Division today, but I hope that by tomorrow I will have available the equivalent of this division, if it becomes necessary.

Please believe me, dear General, respectfully and with profound regard,  
FOCH

At this moment, I was making some changes in my staff. General Berthelot, to whose brilliant services I have several times referred in these pages, was given command of a group of reserve divisions. I replaced him as Assistant Chief of Staff by General Nudant, Chief of Staff of the Fourth Army, he being succeeded in his functions by Lieutenant-Colonel Paquette.

On November 28th, G.H.Q. was transferred to Chantilly. The offices of the staff were installed at the Hotel du Grand Condé, where there was ample room for the numerous services which the necessities of the hour had obliged me to create. My own quarters were in the villa belonging to M. Poiret.

It was during this period that for the first time I was able to make an opportunity to visit the eastern regions, and on November 24th, at Thann, I made the acquaintance of the Alsatian people. "We have been waiting

for you for 44 years," said one of the delegates sent to meet me. My reception by the Alsatians, whose fidelity had not been shaken by half a century of captivity, impressed me in a way that I can never forget.

In looking back to the closing days of the year 1914, the following impressions recur to my memory as dominating my thoughts at that moment.

The Victory of the Marne and the two months of hard campaigning which followed it had arrested the most formidable invasion which France had ever experienced up to that time—and she had seen many. The enemy had been driven back; but he had firmly fastened himself upon our soil and we had been obliged to leave in his hands, for a length of time whose duration no-one could now estimate, a rich part of our country: Lille, the larger portions of our northern coal fields, the whole of our mining regions of Briey and Longwy, without counting the important towns which along the front remained subject to his menace—Dunkirk, Arras, Amiens, Rheims, Nancy.

This situation was due in part to the action of the Allies in 1814 and 1815, when the wall sustaining our north-eastern frontier was broken down, as well as to the German victories of 1870; what above all made it serious was the fact that nature had placed nearly all of our mining resources on the very edge of our frontier.

Nevertheless, the fact remained that here at the end of 1914 the Germans, whose whole plan was based upon a swift and complete destruction of the French Army, had now lost all hope of winning the war. This impression was very vivid in my mind, and the memoirs since written by German military men, such as Hindenburg, Tirpitz, Falkenhayn and Ludendorff, have avowed this fact more or less explicitly.

But it was not enough that we had prevented the enemy from winning the war; it was essential to achieve a complete victory over him, reconquer Belgium, the north of France, and our precious provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. This was the heart-breaking problem which faced me.

Being unable to do anything better, the Germans dug themselves into the earth, erecting a defensive system which grew stronger every day. It was our task to attack this immense fortress, drive the enemy from it, defeat him in open country, and impose our will upon him. Out of this situation grew a terrible form of war to which we had to adapt ourselves as rapidly as possible. The first thing to be done was to create a powerful artillery, provided with a quantity of ammunition which literally staggered the imagination. Our start on this long road was modest in the extreme. The munition programme which I had presented to the



Minister of War at a time when I was hoping to drive the enemy from our country by a manœuvre on his right wing, was already much delayed. On November 17th, Major Herbillon,<sup>29</sup> arriving from Bordeaux, informed me that the Minister found it impossible to keep any of the promises he had made relative to the manufacture of munitions, and that we would have to wait more than a month before receiving those I had counted upon for the beginning of November. This delay could not be imputed to M. Millerand, whose energy was too well-known, nor to the manufacturers to whom he had appealed. To start the production of engines as delicate as those we needed required machines, iron ore, coal, and skilled labour. The machines had to be constructed, the coal and iron ore were now on the other side of the barbed wire, and the operatives were mobilized.

I have already spoken of the immense service which the Russians rendered us at the time of the Battle of the Marne; they now began to make their weight felt in the ensuing operations. On November 6th, I received a telegram from the Grand Duke Nicholas, announcing a great victory over the Austrians, who seemed to have been completely routed. The Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armies contemplated sending immediately into the upper valley of the Theiss a dozen infantry divisions for the purpose of threatening Budapest. The Germans also appeared to be in full retreat to the west of Warsaw.

This news gave me great hopes, for I had the right to think that as the Russian pressure increased, the Germans would be obliged to send more troops to the eastern theatre, and that this would facilitate my own task. But on the 17th, the enemy radio announced a great victory over the Russians. These contradictory reports completely upset poor Colonel Ignatieff, the Russian liaison officer at G.H.Q. As the news became more precise, the check suffered by the Russians appeared to be reduced to the region of Thorn; in East Prussia and in the Carpathians, our Allies continued to progress. These fluctuations in the battle proved above all that neither in the matter of officers nor of armament were the Russians the equals of the Germans; on the other hand, they seemed to have a manifest superiority, both material and moral, over the Austro-Hungarians. The latter in three months, had added another list to the series of defeats, already long, which the armies of the dual monarchy had experienced in the course of their history.

As for the Servians, after the victory they had achieved during August in the mountainous region of the Tser, which at one blow had freed

<sup>29</sup> Major Herbillon was liaison officer between the Minister of War and G.H.Q.



their territory, they now had to meet a new Austrian army which penetrated the country in September. Perceiving that their flank was on the point of being turned, the Crown Prince Alexander and the Voivode Putnick made a strategic retirement early in November. Then, although suffering seriously from lack of arms and munitions (we had sent them what we could), the Servians won a brilliant victory at Roudnik during the first days of December, put to rout the Austrian Army and for a second time freed their soil of the invader.

About this time a new belligerent entered the lists. At the commencement of November the Allies had declared war against Turkey, whose tricky manœuvres during the three previous months had kept our diplomats in complete uncertainty. This was an important event, not that the Turks had either an army or a treasury much to be feared in themselves; but the Turkish soldier is brave, and once armed and led by Germany, this traditional enemy of Russia was in a position to stab our Allies in the back by way of the Caucasus. Moreover, as head of Islam, Turkey could stir up trouble for England and France, who, through their foreign possessions, were great Moslem powers. Mistress of the Dardanelles, she could also close the shortest and surest road which united us to Russia, and she could threaten the route to India. In addition to this, the carrying of the conflagration to the Near East, brought the risk of grave complications in the Balkans.

On November 8th we learned that the Japanese had taken Kiaochow from the Germans. I addressed my congratulations to the Japanese Mission at my headquarters for this victory, which took from our adversaries the last of their possessions in the Far East.

At this time these various exterior theatres of operations were not subject to my jurisdiction, which was confined to the armies in the north-east of France; but it was impossible for me not to be deeply interested in them through the influence which they might have upon the front which I never ceased to believe was the principal one, the front where the mass of the German armies faced the French, British and Belgian forces.

It was for these reasons that on January 8, 1915, I caused my Operations Bureau to draw up a note intended to nip in the bud a plan, perhaps seductive at first thought, which had in view nothing less than the constitution of an army composed of troops taken from our depots and to be sent to fight in Austria!

In this note, I declared that the idea was "inacceptable in principle as well as in its method of execution."

The reasons I gave were the following:

1. The men in our depots are not available for this service. Their number is barely sufficient to fill the gaps in our ranks which will be caused by the continuation of the campaign up to next autumn.<sup>30</sup> An army thus constituted would have neither artillery, regimental trains nor services.
2. An army destined to operate against Austria could be made up only by taking troops from the front. The first question to ask is, Can this be done? The answer is, No. The number of army corps now available barely suffice to cover the 400 miles of front we are holding. If their number is reduced we shall be prohibited from attempting any future offensive; we should also be exposed to the danger of having our line pierced and being obliged to draw it further to the rear, should the enemy undertake a violent attack at some well-selected point.
3. Our object is to reach the enemy upon the principal theatre of operations. It is evident to all that this principal theatre lies in the region where Germany has massed the largest and best elements of her forces. It is not Austria that we have to beat, it is Germany; and our preparations must have in view the defeat of that Power.
4. The combination proposed is not only unacceptable in principle but it would be difficult to put into effect.

Salonika is a neutral town and we cannot disembark our troops there. Even if this could be done, the facilities furnished by the railway running to Uskub would not suffice for supplying so large an army. The Servians find great difficulty in supplying the 100,000 men that they now have; what would be the situation if 300,000 Frenchmen were added to the 100,000 Servians?

These objections apply with even greater force to a disembarkation in the Adriatic, from whose waters Admiral Lapeyrère has just withdrawn his squadrons, because he did not consider them in security there.

As a result of my protest, the plan was abandoned. It was destined to appear a few weeks later in the form of the unfortunate expedition to the Dardanelles.

<sup>30</sup> In an appendix to the note I gave the following figures:

During less than five months of war the irrecoverable losses in our active and reserve armies (killed, prisoners, incurably wounded) amounted to 420,000 men. If the war lasts another ten months the definitive losses can be estimated at 840,000.

How many men will the depots have available for meeting these requirements? There will be those now on hand and those to be received during ten months.

At present there are in the depots.....	547,000 men
Of these there are ready for service.....	199,000
Untrained .....	348,000
Coming from the class of 1916, a maximum of.....	270,000 men
Total .....	817,000

At the end of December I suggested to the Minister of War that Japan should be approached with the idea of sending some of their forces to the western theatre. M. Millerand transmitted this proposal to M. Delcassé and I heard nothing more of it for some time. However, at the beginning of March, 1915, I received from the Minister of War a copy of the letter which the Minister of Foreign Affairs had just sent him under date of March 6, 1915. In it M. Delcassé stated that negotiations had been started with Tokio on this subject shortly after war was declared. The suggestion had run counter to the sentiments of the Japanese people. Their army was the product of a compulsory military service, submitted to in order to assure the country's defence. The Japanese people objected to sending their army to a distant land to play the rôle of mercenaries for the advancement of foreign interests.

The Japanese Government later on objected to the plan on the score of the difficulties presented by the question of transport. Then, at a subsequent date, there arose a new event which lay bare the real cause of Japan's refusal to intervene militarily. The Government of Tokio, under cover of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, had taken possession of the German Colony of Tsing Tao; it now addressed a series of demands<sup>31</sup> to China, which, under pretext of solving the Shantung question, sought to obtain from this Power a series of decisions so advantageous in their nature as to secure for Japan a predominating situation in the country. There is no doubt that the moment was well chosen for Japan. France, Great Britain and Russia were fully occupied in Europe, while the United States were absorbed in watching the affairs of the Old World; so that none of these Governments felt disposed to involve themselves in any Chinese complication. M. Delcassé ended by saying that Japan would probably accede to our request as soon as public opinion had further developed in our favour and after China had granted her demands.

It will be remembered that such did not prove to be the case, and I have always regretted that the personal interests which Japan was pursuing in the Far East prevented her from sending her brave soldiers to fight in Europe at our side.

The first phase of the war thus drew to a close and a new phase began. This brought with it many hopes, but it also presented serious problems, bristling with unknown factors.

<sup>31</sup> On January 18, 1915, the Japanese Minister at Pekin, Mr. Hioki, handed President Yuan Chi Kai the famous Twenty-One Demands, which are still a matter of present-day interest.





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